













# **Ananda Coomaraswamy**

**A Study**

*By*

**Moni Bagchee**

With a Foreword by  
**Prof. Niharranjan Ray**



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**'We want our India for ourselves because we believe each nation has its own part to play in the long tale of human progress and nations which are not free to develop their individuality and character are also unable to make the contribution to the sum of human culture which the world has a right to expect of them. Every nation ought to make its contribution to the concert of mankind, the orchestra of human genius.'**

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## FOREWORD

To those who care for the art and life of traditional India through the ages and for her traditional formal and spiritual values, the name of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy is a treasure and a symbol to cherish since he was one of those very few pioneers who re-discovered those values and thus helped the placement of traditional India on the cultural map of the contemporary world. But it is unfortunate that one knows but little of the personal life of this great and wise scholar and thinker. Not that it matters much, but lesser mortals being what they are in their curiosity to know whatever they can of the external facts of life of men like Coomaraswamy, a short biography such as the present one, is perhaps something which is likely to meet a genuine need I would therefore welcome this publication. But, for the story of Coomaraswamy's inner life one must read through the countless number of printed pages on which he poured himself, unstintedly and without reservation. Let me hope that this book will introduce its readers to the great records of Coomaraswamy's inner life, which he has left behind him.

This year we shall be celebrating the centenary of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, one of modern Asia's rarest of creative intellectuals. In his own lifetime, Coomaraswamy probably did more than any other man to put the traditional art and culture of India on the map of world art and culture. This he did, be it noted, not as a creative artist but purely as a sharply perceptive and deeply introspective intellectual who had cultivated an ideological commitment. Six feet high, lanky, light in weight and lean in build, Coomaraswamy had a sharp, determined chin, a pair of penetrating eyes,



and the conviction and courage, the patience and persistence of a fighter for a cause.

Born of a Sinhalese father and an English mother, educated and nurtured in England in the best English social and academic tradition, disciplined in the research methods of geological sciences in which he took a doctoral degree from a British university, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy was caught up, early in his career, in the high tide of contemporary nationalism that was sweeping all over India and certain other regions of Asia. He gave up science and the vocation which he had been led to by his earlier training. For the rest of his life he gave himself up to studying and re-establishing the religious and spiritual base of Indian cultural nationalism and the values of the high traditional art of India, and interpreting them to an increasingly wider audience. He did this through tireless and incessant writing of notes, articles, monographs and books, through editing and translating texts and interpreting them, and often through entering the arena of polemical exercise. His total published output was more than 100 titles. And these were not just facile essays, but the result of intensive and painstaking research involving sources drawn from more than half-a-dozen languages : Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Greek, Latin, German, French, English, and materials from literature, archaeology, science and technology, ethnology, history, religion, ethics and metaphysics. He was as much at home with early and medieval Christianity and Judaism as with Vedism, Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism. His great regard for tradition, and for matters of the intellect and the spirit, could only be matched by his deep distrust of everything modern including modern science and technology, by his disregard for everything pertaining to senses, the emotions and the demands of concrete existence.

Caught up by the high tide of Indian nationalism, Coomaraswamy too, like Havell and many others of his times, proved himself to be a protagonist of his cause. This cause was to justify to Western minds the traditional Indian way of life, and

hence to justify Indian art, and to rationalize and plead for the recognition of the spiritual, idealistic and symbolical basis of the Indian cultural heritage. All this he did with a firm faith and devotion and an intense sincerity of conviction that had hardly any parallel. He became indeed a high priest of our cultural nationalism. Uptill now he is perhaps the best and most well-informed interpreter besides being the stoutest defender of our art, and this at a time when it had badly been in need of defense.

Coomaraswamy had been cut off from birth from the traditional roots and contemporary ways of life in India. He had been nurtured and educated in an alien environment and atmosphere and obliged to live, except for a few brief sojourns in India, in England and the United States. His whole life seems to have been a nostalgic throwback indeed to the land of his forefathers, a conscious and laborious attempt to affiliate himself to the roots of the people and the culture to which, he thought, he rightly belonged. He therefore lived and died to re-discover the India of the past; but by reason of the very circumstance of his life he was obliged to effect his re-discovery through the texts of a bygone age, texts both sacredotal and secular, but produced, in the main, within the confines of hieratic religious orders, and hence doctrinal and prescriptive in nature and idealistic in character. Indeed, Coomaraswamy's India emerged, by and large, from such texts. His knowledge of these texts was vast and deep, and to this he added his almost equally vast knowledge of texts relating to early and medieval Christianity and Judaism, and thus was reared up a mind and imagination which was essentially priestly and scholastic in character, an intellectual attitude which was highly skeptical of modern science and technology, even of universal literacy.

This mind and this vast erudition he brought to bear upon his study of the question of traditional values of Indian art and culture, and step by step he began to formulate the principles which he thought had fed and sustained Indian art through the ages. His basic assumption, which he was inevitably and

irresistibly led to, was that Indian aesthetics was based on the doctrines, prescriptions and conventions of religions that were transcendental and intellectual in character and idealistic in aim and purpose. His interpretation of terms and concepts of aesthetic import were, therefore, conditioned to a large extent by the doctrines, prescriptions and conventions of these intellectual, idealistic and transcendental faiths. This basic assumption led him inevitably to an undue and sometimes irrelevant emphasis on the literary, religious, symbolical and metaphysical content of Indian art at the expense of important imaginative and aesthetic considerations, namely, problems of artistic form and its evolution, and the human and social context of art. Indian art, it seems, was to him illustrative of Indian religions, their concepts and speculations, doctrines and conventions, symbols and imageries. This seems to explain the infinite care and pains he took to explain and interpret the symbols and conventions of our art and the iconography of our icons. The "Indian-ness" of our art, he seems to have argued, lay in its literary, religious and symbolical content.

Yet, Coomaraswamy has been eminently successful in influencing attitudes and approaches in respect of the study and understanding of Indian aesthetics, art criticism and art history. The fact is that until very recent years most writers on Indian art and aesthetics, both Indian and Western, including myself, have more or less followed the tracks laid down by him. It is Coomaraswamy who is mainly responsible for the fact that Indian activities in creative art have very largely been frankly literary and ideological. It was he who seemed to have furnished the theory and the intellectual inspiration on which came to be based the revival of our art activities during the first three decades of this century. Even today Coomaraswamy remains the source to which one inevitably turns for an understanding of Indian art and aesthetics.

But Coomaraswamy was somewhat more than just this. The more he grew in age, the deeper he delved into the wisdom and

spiritual values of the ancient Orient and medieval Christendom, the more did he give himself up to a life of the mind and the spirit, the more did he turn his back to the changes and challenges of modern life. Much of these changes and challenges he chose to ignore; these were aberrations, according to him, born of the ignorance of what he considered to be the traditional but perennial values of life. In fact, he became the messiah of a new way of life, a new mode of thought, of a simpler but wiser pattern of living. Indeed, he came to plead for a life of absolute idealistic abstraction. Of this Coomaraswamy one knows but little, except the very few who chose to draw themselves close to him. A Coomaraswamy cult was thus built up, mostly in Europe and America. But the cult could not hold him because Coomaraswamy, by the very reason of his being an intellectual and a lover of life, of music and the plastic arts, proved himself to be much bigger than the cult he came to stand for.

**Niharranjan Ray**





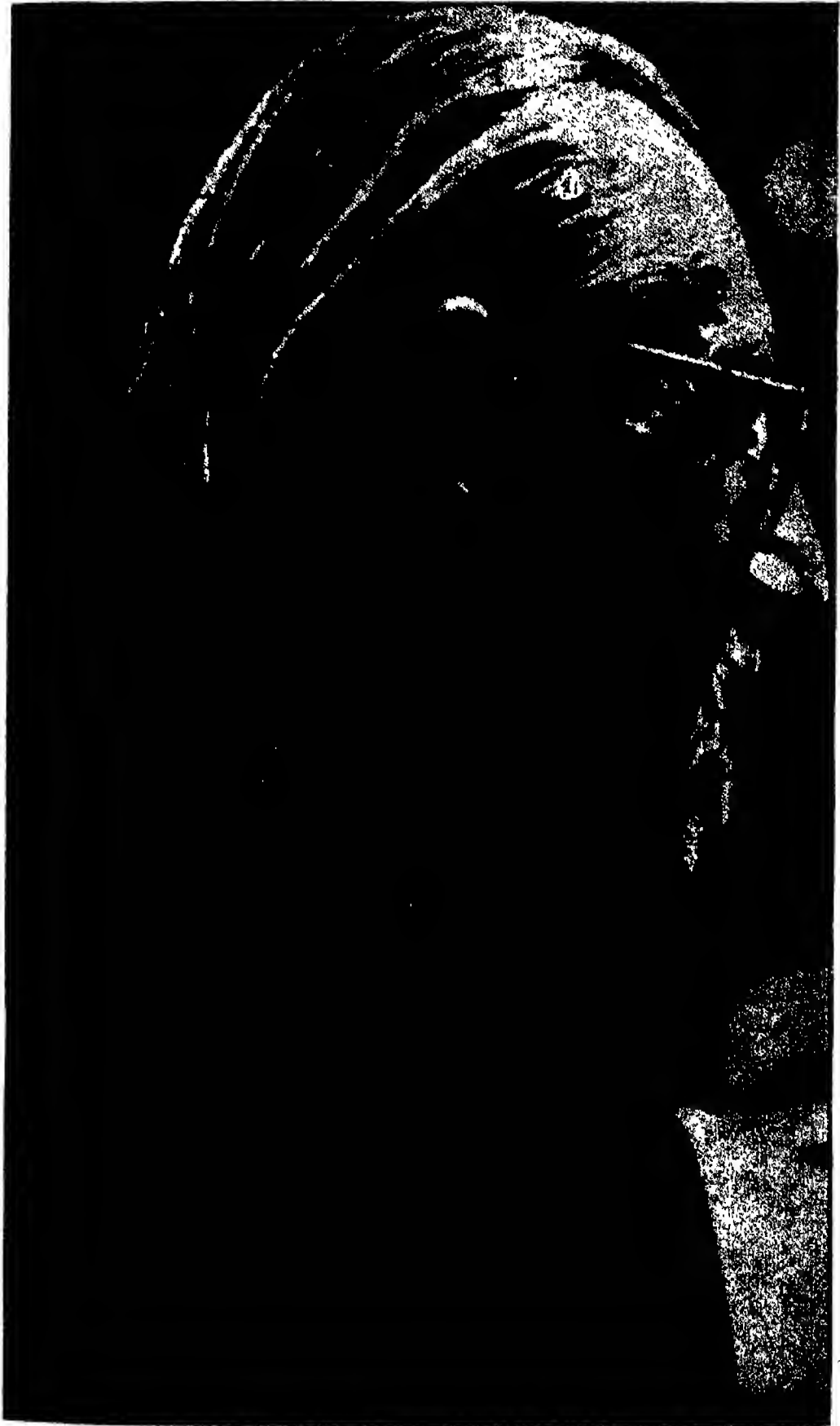
*Dedicated*  
**To the memory of**  
*Rabindra Nath Tagore*  
**The high-priest of Indian Culture**













## **Introduction**

A PIONEER in the study of Indian art, the very name of Ananda Coomaraswamy conjures up in our mind a world of aesthetics, religion and culture. The most versatile mind of his generation, Coomaraswamy was brilliantly polymath and his work, straddling aesthetics and literary criticism, reflects the deepest intuitions of the perennial tradition derived from Indian and European sources. His life was given to interpreting the East to the West, and often the West to itself. Indeed, he was 'an all-seeing light', and a rare combination of scholar, researcher, expositor, interpreter and critic. He opened our eyes to the glories of our cultural heritage in a manner which still remains unsurpassed.

Coomaraswamy's message is particularly appropriate now when many in the West feel that our culture has reached a dead end, and our casting about for a new ideal that can replace that of Faustian man. The spectrum of his thought can be perfectly viewed at different wave-lengths. And Coomaraswamy, who had an unusual background, was a man of varied talents and interests—a scientist, an ardent Indian nationalist, an interpreter of Indian art in its wider perspectives, a literary critic and, above all, a philosopher in the truest sense of the term. Child of Ceylon and England, Coomaraswamy became an Indian in the same deep sense in which Margaret Noble transformed herself into an Indian and retransplanted herself into an Indian woman. Indeed, Nivedita became more Indian than any Indian. And such was the case with Ananda Coomaraswamy who frequently used to say : 'I am much too Indian in my ways of thinking, and my love for India is my destiny.'

The idea of writing a biography of Coomaraswamy first dawned on me when in 1928 I was invited by the then Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Hiranmay Banerjee, of the Rabindra Bharati University, to deliver a lecture on the life and work of this great art historian and Indologist. Then, following the publication of that lecture in an English daily, I was the recipient of a number of letters from some distinguished persons, requesting me to attempt writing a biography of Ananda Coomaraswamy. It was at that time that I came to learn that Mrs Coomaraswamy herself would compile a biography of her husband after she had edited the collected writings of Coomaraswamy. I do not know if her projected work has been written at all or published. Since then I began to collect almost single handed relevant data of Coomaraswamy's life from various sources and I remember with gratitude the help I received from Dr. Radhakamal Mukherjee who personally knew Coomaraswamy.

When I undertook this task I was all along conscious of my own limitations. What is therefore being presented here, let me state frankly, is neither a scholarly work nor a comprehensive one. Yet I hope this monograph will provide a background to the understanding of the mind and face of the man who entered deeply into the spirit of Indian art and life and who placed India on the cultural map of the world with all her pristine glory. The external scenery of Coomaraswamy's life is of little importance—it is his mind, the all-encompassing mind that is of real importance to the study of this multi-splendoured genius.

I must express my gratefulness to Durai Raja Singam who has done almost single handed the pioneering research work on the life and work of Coomaraswamy. Alone he collected massive information and has already published two volumes from which I have drawn considerably the relevant materials. Yet I feel that the inadequacy of this monograph is pronounced on every page of it.

Finally, I am grateful to my esteemed friend and the renowned scholar on Indian culture, Dr. Niharranjan Ray, for the foreword to this humble work which is now being offered to the admirers of Ananda Coomaraswamy on the eve of his birth centenary.

**Moni Bagchee**

## CHAPTER I

### MY APPROACH TO THE SUBJECT

‘NEVER GET into a biography. The greatest thing I have learnt is never to think for myself, or, to make an exhibition of myself’.

Thus true to the Hindu tradition, Coomaraswamy was opposed to any kind of biography. This renders difficult the problem of presenting even a few details about his remarkable life. But our task would be easier if we can fully comprehend the magnificent mind of Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy which really matters in the study of this great talent which knew no frontiers. Here was a man of vast erudition who might be called as ‘God’s wonderful rainbow-coloured creation’ the like of which is seldom found in the history of mankind. Coomaraswamy himself deprecated personality and personalism, and condemned the contemporary mania for exhibitionary self-exploitation. In fact, he was the most reticent of men in furnishing biographical details. Yet, for lay readers, such details, and an outline of his crowded career, seem necessary for an understanding of the broad foundations of his towering thought-structure.

It has been said that people of extraordinary cultural achievement invariably possess remarkable personal qualities, if not highly idiosyncratic and complex modes of thinking and acting, that can often be as interesting and influential as their creative work. In order to define the dimension and significance of Coomaraswamy’s cultural activity and also to assess and evaluate the pattern and contents of his thought, one must look at his multi-splendoured mind, for there is nothing on the surface with which to probe the innermost depths of his life and



work. All through his life Ananda Coomaraswamy, was a silent man, nay an intensely introvert man, and that is the way with the master minds of the world most of whom believed that silence is all.

Coomaraswamy was not merely an eminent orientalist, nor was he merely an acknowledged authority on oriental art. The ideas he formulated in his books, monographs and essays, are expressed with the authority of a lifetime of scholarship. His pen was an instrument of precision. His closely and tightly woven fabric of thought was the very model of explicit denotation—a virtue of written expression that is now-a-days being rediscovered. In the unfolding of this myriad-minded intellect from geology to archaeology and thence to all the arts and expressions, from the humblest to the highest aspirations of all mankind—one is tempted to find a parallel to Leonardo's universal interests. Never had he had time for, nor interests in, presenting personal ideas or novel theories, so constantly and so timelessly had he devoted his energies to the rediscovery of truth and the relating of the principles by which cultures rise and fall. Nor did he ever compromise or pull his punches in stating these truths as he had discovered them. Besides possessing a highly perceptive mind, Coomaraswamy had a mind's eye with which he penetrated the surface and reached to the core of the things not easily visible in our plain eyes or frosted mind. This accounts for Coomaraswamy's excellent analysis and lucid interpretation of the spirit of Indian art and Indian way of life.

Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, by universal consent, belongs to the galaxy of the immortals radiating a soft and serene light for anybody to find his way through the forest of the unknown to the citadel or sanctuary of cultural heritage of India. To him the geographical entity that is India, was not a barrier for his search for and attainment of truth. Truth to him revealed in the image of an experience imbued with the accumulated wisdom of the ages. Humanity as a whole, has through the aeons, contributed to the build up of wisdom. That

is why to Coomaraswamy, himself a product of the resurgent and reawakened India of the nineteenth century, nationalism was not enough; even patriotism to him was parochial. There were before him finer parts which great men are ordained to play. He took upon himself the onerous duty and obligation of an ambassador of a subjugated country, representing and explaining her culture to the world.

Born a century ago, in Ceylon, of an enlightened parentage, educated and lived in England for the first twenty five years of his life. On return to homeland, Coomaraswamy took up government service in a department which was alien to his mental make-up. The pilgrim came to India and in course of his sojourn bathed deep in the various reservoirs which had preserved the spirit of forty centuries of a nation's civilization. He discovered for himself the basis, the functions and purpose of India's civilization. It is very much astonishing to find in his writings scholarly references to and discourses on so many different branches of knowledge ranging from paintings and sculpture to philosophy, music, classical literature, social science and other diverse subjects. The conclusions, decisions and synthesis he arrived at, the classifications he made,—not only in arts and architecture, but almost in all the subjects he touched upon—even after new discoveries and researches made in course of all the years after the publication of his innumerable writings, have not been found to be incorrect or incomplete. Indeed, he had a critic's mind and a seer's vision, too. And this was the special trait of his genius.

Amidst the turbulent upsurge of the national movement, Coomaraswamy, then a young man in his early thirties, came in contact with the then leading personalities in India including the Tagores and others. It was at that time that he sat with Sister Nivedita and wrote his *Essays in National Idealism* in which he observed: 'India is losing her individuality through a vain and sycophantic mimicry of an alien race. In the opinion of the thinking it must appear that it is not worth-while being a nation at all, or making any attempts at political

*freedom, if India is to remain in the end thus enslaved at heart by purely material ideals. The national movement has no justification if it does not carry with it some hope of a new manifestation of the Indian genius in relation to the real things of life . . . . . The unrest which is permeating educated India is a struggle for spiritual and mental freedom from the domination of an alien ideal, and that it is not so much the material as the moral and spiritual subjection of Indian civilization that in the end impoverishes humanity.'*

Thus it appeared to the vision of Coomaraswamy that the idealism which permeates the Indian mind in every sphere—art, literature, poetry — is but reflection of her thought. It was for him to read the deeper meaning of the struggle which was on the surface political, but at the depth below the effervescence of the political movement and ideological cross currents was the calm philosophical reality of the soul of a great and ancient nation. He felt this Reality of the soul of India and all that it achieved and realised in the past. He felt it in his blood, in his existence, in all his efforts and activities. It was something like touching the Eternity. This contact with the soul of India enabled him to locate the genesis of the national political movement not rooted in any particular programme of any particular political party, but in the natural process of evolutionary expression of a nation.

The prevailing political bondage, the continued deprivation from realisation of its own heritage to which the nation was subjected to for more than seven hundred years, Coomaraswamy saw, was being challenged as the first sure proof that a nation was remaking itself, that its people's aspiration for freedom from bondage of alien political domination, from illiteracy, from superstition, from all taboos, was beginning to crystalise. But political independence is not the end in itself; it is but the gateway to bigger and nobler spheres. Every individual, every ethnic group, every nation has to give in return what was given into it by the forefathers and by the environment.

But the continued enslavement of the nation had permeated to the core of its vitality and the eventual corrosion had already set in. To quote Coomaraswamy; 'Every oppressed nationality oppresses some other or embraces the oppression class by class. Our sympathies are then not only with the oppressed, but with the oppressor, for both alike are in need of salvation from the same group of false values.' It was in this context that he said: 'The liberty that we concede is of far greater significance to us than any liberty we can take by force or receive by gift'. Social reform to him, however, was not abolition of the castes. It is curious to know Coomaraswamy's ideas about the caste system prevalent in Indian society. It was in January 1946 that he was invited to deliver an address to the Student's Religious Association, in America. The subject he chose was 'The Religious basis of the forms of Indian Society.' Speaking about the problem of untouchability, one of the curses of the orthodox Hindu society, he said: 'Mahatma Gandhi, universally regarded as a great spiritual force in the world, would like to resolve the untouchables' problem, but still believes in the theory of the caste system. To do away with the caste to reduce all men to the condition of the modern proletarians who have no vocation but only jobs, would not be a solution, but much rather a dissolution'. On another occasion while discussing on the same subject he is credited with this remark; 'Let us understand one another before we try to put each other right.'<sup>1</sup>

The caste system as it evolved in ancient India, Coomaraswamy correctly analysed, was 'drawn at once ethnically and culturally (not pecuniarily), represents an integration (not division) of society in vocational groups internally democratic, and outwardly answerable to other groups only for the fulfilment of their function'. It was in this perspective that the seer in Coomaraswamy raised the voice of warning in these significant words: 'The greatest danger for India is the loss of her

1. for full text of the speech see Appendix I. 4

*spiritual integrity ..... Striving after a political integrity without giving importance to spiritual integrity is a pathetic endeavour. Modern India has put a stigma on caste system without even caring to understand the real significance thereof, without trying to know why and how this system has excellently performed in the past.*

How can a nation achieve spiritual integrity? To this question Coomaraswamy's answer is very definite. 'It is only by following a policy of expansive and intensive education that we can expect spiritual integrity. Therefore of all our problems the educational is the most difficult and most tragic'. No other Indian excepting perhaps Vivekananda thought in the same way. A government composed of uneducated, rather uncultivated leaders, and a country inhabited preponderately by illiterate masses, create an antithesis to progress. What is then education?

Education to Coomaraswamy was human, that is universal, and not any local or national affair. There is no, and cannot be any fundamental divergence of human character. The apparent divergences of character between an Asiatic and an European, to Coomaraswamy, was superficial, and 'deeper we penetrate, the more we discover an identity in the inner life of Asia and Europe'. Upon this basis of universal human intelligence, every nation must build its own edifice of knowledge. Aim of education cannot be narrow; the principle on which a policy of education has to be drawn up must have an outlook wide enough to prepare mind to receive, assort, classify, analyse, synthesise and finally accept the outcome of every thing that is brought before it. The idea of a university to Coomaraswamy, seems to be akin to that of cardinal Newman of the late nineteenth century.

Coomaraswamy spent his early manhood in England when the Oxford Movement was at its summit. To an enlightened parentage, which he had, the regeneration of aesthetic and

cultural upsurge of England could not but have profound impression. Again, in his early thirties when he came in contact with the Tagores, particularly with Rabindranath, perhaps he found expression to his emotional experience in the famous line of the Poet : 'Where mind is without fear and the head is held high'. It was the sublime prayer of the Poet to his creator to awaken his countrymen to that environment which helps man to realise his self. Man is after all a social being; it is the society in which he is born that shapes his self. Individual attainment to whatever excellence it may be raised, cannot be the final stage of human development unless that individual attainment is utilised for the progressive development of the society. It is as if a give and take condition in which the society shapes an individual and demands the individual to shape the society in return.

Coomaraswamy's belief was that the individual must be taught what he has got from his environment, from the accumulated knowledge of his forebears, that is the society. The object of education, therefore, cannot but be liberal, true to its sense. A liberal mind will perceive that all things are endearing, that all things around him indicate to his happiness. He must be taught in such a way that he can appreciate all that is good in life, good in the society he belongs to, good in all parts of the world. It was due to an unsympathetic alien rule under which Coomaraswamy's generation suffered, that all those good things of India's national life, of India's age-old heritage and good things of other countries of the world were denied to it. The ancient literature, art and architecture, the ethics of Indian social system, the econo-political wisdom and Philosophies of the past, are the great and good things of India which should be studied, and the lesson infused in our life. We can thereby create conditions for a class of modern Brahman true to its meaning, who in the days of old 'considered all activity not directed in accordance with a consistent theory of the meaning and purpose of life as supremely unpractical.' The 'Brahman'

in a modern society is he, who sincerely believes in the saying of Socrates, and can utter into himself : 'may the outward and inward of mine be at one.' Like evil, goodness is also contagious. Why should we not strive to create an atmosphere congenial to the growth of superman, heroes, leaders of society, — the Brahmins ?

Every nation, every ethnic group has its own part to play in the long tale of human progress; and unless they are politically free, educationally developed, culturally aware of their own heritage, cannot 'make any contribution to the sum of human culture which the world has a right to expect of them.' The Swadeshi movement to Coomaraswamy had its ideological basis in the nation's desire for self-realisation. Atmanam Biddhi—know thyself, this great saying of the great past was rediscovered in India with the true of the nineteenth century. Not only political sphere in the freedom movement, but also in every branch of human enterprises, the great saying worked as the basic force from which emanated all the diversified new activities of the nation in remaking.

But along with this *resurgements* — national rejuvenation, a danger was also creeping in : the danger of unbalanced patriotism. To Coomaraswamy, independence meant not merely political freedom from an alien domination. It was also not revival of the old dogmas, prejudices and the degenerated state of Indian life which was prevalent at the time the Europeans had been extending their political frontier in our country. The national upsurge during the first decade of this century, instead of establishing a profound basis for the new generation to step on, in our newly developing industrial organisations, in our economic and political blue-prints for own future state for which the entire nation was struggling, we blindly copied the West. The result, even after the independence, that is political freedom, cannot be defended to be a happy one, and Ananda Coomaraswamy had to caution as just a few months before his death, in the following soul-stirring words.

‘Freedom is the opportunity to act in accordance with one’s own nation. But our leaders are already denatured-Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. They have no more the moral to ‘be themselves’ without which they can be of little use to themselves or anyone else.’

When India attained her independence, the message which Coomaraswamy gave us consisted only of two words: ‘Be yourself’. It placed the accent on aesthetic authenticity and not on the political content of freedom. ‘Nations’, he observed, ‘are created by poets and artists, not by merchants and politicians. In art lies the deepest life principle. With him art was the way of life. No wonder, therefore, that to Coomaraswamy Indian national upsurge was a quest for self-realisation, a declaration of spiritual independence. He was destined to discover that art and architecture as well as music and literature in India had their roots in religion and nourished by philosophical concepts have paved the way for the classes as well as the masses for the attainment of the desired end. His writings are innumerable and they are not pedantic. His love and gratitude for the heritage of India were unbounded. If Coomaraswamy had any doctrine to preach it was this : ‘The well of wisdom, knowledge and happiness, is not beyond anybody’s reach ; come one, come all, drink to your full from the well ; carry the contents and give it unto all’.

One more point. Coomaraswamy has been labelled by some of his critics as a traditionalist. The fact, however, is otherwise. He always looked inward to tradition, he captured special nuances which full mirrors cannot catch. He looked inward to the age old artistic tradition of India. In him art was the handmaid of religion, and thus his presentment of Indian art was most original and new.

Homage to such a man is offered in the following pages in the humility of the knowledge that, living, he would have



spurned it. Writing an 'autobiography, felt Coomaraswamy, would be against heaven. 'The absence of names in the history of Indian art,' he wrote, 'is a great advantage to the historian of art, for he is forced to concentrate all his attention upon their work, and its relation to life and thought as a whole, while all temptation to anecdotal criticism is removed.' Thus would Coomaraswamy like to be judged, by the degree only to which his ideas stand the test of time. He really lived in the future; the future that is for others to shape. We shall therefore probe the innermost depths of his life and work, seeking to find out its meaning and purpose as reflected in his own writings. This will be my approach to the study of the mind and face of this great pilgrim, who brought to bear upon the heritage of the East an orderly and balanced mind that had been trained by the scientific processes of the west. His was a dedicated life to blend two cultures for the good of humanity at large.

## CHAPTER II

### The Cultural Heritage of India

A BRIEF survey of Indian art as it developed in course of time chiefly in the spheres of architecture, sculpture and painting, is necessary for proper understanding of the standard of culture and refinement attained by the nameless artists belonging to this ancient land. Every ancient culture holds some interest for all of us; but when the culture is a continuing culture, that interest becomes much more contemporary, much more topical. In the case of the study of ancient culture like the Babylonian or the Egyptian, or even the ancient Greek, we study them more from a historical point of view, just to enrich ourselves from the experiences of the past. But the study of Indian culture is of special significance to us, because it is still a living factor in the life of nearly one-seventh of the human race.

How this culture arose nearly five thousand years ago, how it developed and was enriched in subsequent centuries, and, finally, how it has come down to us as a rich human legacy is therefore a very fascinating and rewarding study. The vast and varied Vedic literature gives us an insight into the mind and mood of India of the Vedic period. The thoughts and insights gained by the gifted minds of this period became the foundation and the stimulus of all later developments of culture and thought in India. They have bequeathed a *Weltanschauung* which has sustained India for centuries, and which is dynamic even today. To understand Indian culture, we have to get an insight into this *Weltanschauung*. Every culture and civilization has behind it the inspiration of a philosophy. The understanding of the philosophy is necessary for the comprehension of the mind and mood and processes of its culture or

civilization. 'A civilization without a philosophy', says Hegel, 'is like a temple without the holy of the holies'.

India had known civilization even before the Aryans came down from their Arctic home or from the shores of the Caspian or wherever they really came from, while Indian culture in its long career has experimented with life in its diverse aspects and levels. It has not neglected any of the values of life, but it has concentrated more on some than on others. Politics, economics, art, science, religion, and philosophy—all these have been enriched by its contributions; but its greatest and most unique contribution is in the field of religion and philosophy. To treat Indian culture and outlook as other worldly, as some western writers have done, is thus not true to fact. Other worldliness, transcendentalism, is undoubtedly its characteristic feature; but at the base of this transcendentalism is a robust positivism with zest in life, and its expression in art, literature, music and dance. No wonder, therefore, that India has been known to other nations as a land of wealth and philosophic wisdom; both trade with India and communion with her mind were much sought after. These facts go to show that the people of ancient India took keen interest in man as a member of the society, man struggling to overcome external obstacles, man seeking delight in social and personal existence.

True art is an unerring expression of mind, and a national art is a true reflex of national character. Great nations of the world have left behind them unmistakable evidence of their greatness in their works of art. The nature and excellence of art constitute a sure means by which we can understand the essential characteristic of a nation and make a fair estimate of its greatness. Judged by the standard of art, Indian civilization must be regarded as occupying a very high place indeed among those of antiquity. Indian culture in its ultimate analysis reflects the religious spirit, occasionally reaching to a sublime height, that dominated the entire population. It shows, as the national ideal, the subordination of the ideals of physical beauty to ethical conceptions and spiritual bliss. Amid the luxuries

and the comforts of worldly life, the thought of the world beyond never ceased to exercise a dominant influence. This is the meaning and significance of the cultural heritage of India. Indian culture, it should be noted here, reached and profoundly influenced the far East through Buddhism and sometimes fused with and sometimes existed side by side with Taoism, confuciasm and shinto.

Let us now look at the form and content of Indian culture. Architecture, sculpture and painting are the three great arts which come to the spirit through the eye. Indian architecture, sculpture and painting are not only one in inspiration with the central things in Indian philosophy, religion and culture, but a specially intense expression of their significance. The sub-continent India extends so vastly in time and space that it appears to have no beginning at all. Centuries and centuries ago this land had built up cultures of great stability and beauty the origins of which seem to be beyond the pale of memory. Racially and culturally this land has seen many a civilization grow and decay, far from pre-historic times various cultures have invaded the land and settled here. Naturally these has been a constant intermingling and what we call Indian civilization to day is the product of these various cultures. From all the facts and historical evidences so far available to us, we can say without any fear of contradiction that there was no break in the continuity of culture and civilization between Indian and other countries from the most ancient times.

It is now known from the records of the ancient Historians like Pliny, Strabo, Megasthenes, Herodotus and others that as India was influenced by other cultures, so those civilized countries were also equally influenced by India through the medium of trade and commerce and also of religions mission. The civilization of India was highly regarded by almost all the ancient authors of different countries. In fact between the year 1500 and 500 B.C. the Hindus were so far advanced in religion, metaphysics, philosophy, science, art, music and medicine that no other nation could stand as their rival or compete with any of these branches

of knowledge. The cultural centre of Alexandria is well-known to all the students of history. We should, indeed, bear in mind that after the invasion of India by Alexander the great, the connection between India and Greece became closer than ever before, and many Hindu philosophers lived at Athens and other parts of Greece. At that time Alexandria became the centre of opportunity for interchange of ideas between the Hindus and Western nations. Some are of opinion that the fusion of ideas in cultural, religious and spiritual fields happened for the first time in the Buddhist period. But it is far from truth. The process of fusion happened long before it, the Vedic and classical civilizations won the credit of their contributions to the West. However it can be said that permeation of Indian culture and civilization during the Asoka period was great.

The aesthetic side of a people's culture is of the highest and demands almost as much scrutiny and care-fulness of appreciation as the philosophy, religion and central formative ideas which have been the foundation of Indian life and of which much of the art and literature is a conscious expression in significant aesthetic forms. Each nation creates its own symbol and out of it emerges its conception of art which is directly related to culture. The higher the fine arts of a people or a nation, the higher is its cultural level. The conception, inherent in a nation or a people, colours her creation in the realm of painting, sculpture, architecture, literature and music. Broadly speaking, art in all its phases is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Beautiful, and the highest ideal of the traditional Hindu culture has all along been universalism.

Indian thought has always regarded life as a movement of the Eternal in time, of the universal in the individual, of the infinite in the finite, of the Divine in man. Her seers declared that a divine perfection has always been India's ultimate objective. And it was this ideal which she has for ever endeavoured to fulfil in the life of the race and in the life as well of the entire humanity. Almost from the dawn of her history it has been

the sole privilege of India to carry the torch of her unique ideals to distant lands and inspire them to noble adventures both in the inner and outer fields of human activity. Her matchless wisdom, her splendid art have left their indelible stamp on the civilizations of almost all the great peoples of history.

The culture of India was like a sky-high tower of light shedding its lustre on the surrounding countries, even on those at the far ends of the earth, illumining the mind of man, exalting his heart, ennobling his life and, above all, beckoning him on to the realisation of his highest spiritual destiny. The story is indeed a romantic one of how India gave expression to this impulse of her soul and built up her cultural empire in the mind and heart of humanity. The sources so far available are not enough for reconstructing a complete story of how in the past India built up her cultural empire through the diffusion of her ideas in countries far and near. Buddhism, it should be noted here, was a great force in the expansion of Indian culture.

Indian culture began to enter the mind of Europe and other countries more widely and deeply when in modern times distance was annihilated by quicker and easier means of communication. Indeed, the subjective tendency of the present age is to a great extent the result of the infiltration of Indian thought into the mind of humanity. An inner seeking is evident every where, and urge to know the deeper meaning of things. In fine, 'Indian culture', as Ananda Coomaraswamy rightly observes, 'is of value to us not so much because it is Indian as because it is culture.' With this preliminary discussion, let us now have a panoramic look into three broad aspects of Indian culture.

The history of architecture is the history of mankind. Each culture produces new versions of the house of God, the house of man, and the house of the dead. In their outward form, these structures express and project the deepest feelings and highest inspirations of mankind. Although architecture

by itself lacks the subject matter of painting or sculpture, it is often able to tell us far more about how people worshipped, lived and died—what they glorified, and what they feared. From many of the epochs of man's history nothing has survived but a few fragments of his buildings ; from these slender clues we piece together the appearance and purpose of some of the great cultural achievements of all time. Indian architecture unfolds the story of India's age-old culture and civilization.

The history of Indian architecture must begin with the buildings of the great cities which flourished in the Indus Valley civilization between about 3000 and 1500 B. C. There are two chief sites, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, lying several miles apart. The mound of Harappa was largely spoiled before it was possible to excavate ; most of our information concerning these cities, therefore, comes from the scientific excavation of Mohenjo-Daro. A most extraordinary feature of the architecture of the Indus Valley Cities is that there is no trace of their having been ornamental with plaster work or painting. We know that the visual arts were indeed practised in these cities, and some interesting fragments have been discovered, although all are small. The Indus Valley appears to have been immune from the threat of invasion for a very long time. Then the cities of this Valley suffered a sudden and complete eclipse round about 1500 B. C. by the invasion of a barbarian people sometimes identified with the Aryans. Thereafter, the Indus Valley civilization and its architecture disappeared from history.

The most artistic objects at Mohenjo-Daro are no doubt the seal-engravings, portraying animals like the humped bull, the buffalo, the bison etc. Regarding these objects Marshall observes : 'In no sense can these objects be regarded as products of primitive or archaic art. Small as they are, they demonstrate a thorough comprehension of both work in the round and relief, and exhibit a spontaneity and truthfulness to nature of which even Hellenic art might not have been ashamed.'

The earliest true structural architecture of India, for which we have evidence, has left no remains, for it was executed entirely on wood. However, in stone-relief carvings of the second century B. C. to the first century A. D., there are many representations of buildings; there are rock-cut caves which imitate the form of wooden architecture, and there are literary descriptions. Together these enable us to gain a fairly precise idea of the architecture of the time. The earliest surviving architecture of India, mainly Buddhist, takes three forms : the first consist of rock-cut preaching caves; the second of living caves ( *Vihāras* ), the third of *Stūpas*. In the hot climate of India, innumerable caves have served generations of religious men as shrines and meditation retreats. By far the most important type of early cave in is the Buddhist preaching hall.

The evolution of Hindu temple begins with the village shrine. At the present day, the various stages of evolution may be observed still in progress at different places. The Indian villager has always been prepared to recognise the divine in natural objects, whenever it manifests itself. Thus an ancient tree with snake holes at its foot, and ant-hill or a spring will be recognised as sacred. Gradually people of substance will provide a carved stone slab to receive offerings, a railing to keep away cattle and sanctify the ground as an enclosure and ultimately a built-shelter for the hollows. Later, this shelter and the hollow chamber may be adorned with sculpture, and an image of the deity may be installed. The earliest form of Hindu structural temple consisted, thus, of a single cell with a small portico attached, supported by one or two pairs of columns. This remained the fundamental pattern for the temple, although it was subject to considerable expansion and decoration.

The earliest example of this type in stone is actually a Buddhist shrine reconstructed at the hill at Sanchi. By the end of the fifth century, it had become conventional to all to the roof of the cell a solid superstructure of stone in the form of a buttressed pyramid with either straight or curvilinear sides.



One characteristic and constant feature of the Indian temple, from the earliest times, was an ornate frame on the exterior of the cell door bearing sculptured figures of the purifying river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna at the base of the jambs, an ornate lintal usually with the figure of the goddess of fortune in the centre, and a series of small panels of amorous couples ranged up the jambs. From about 600 onwards, it also became conventional to employ a great deal of figure sculpture, chiefly in panels of narrative or iconic relief, ceiling ornament, friezes of flying celestials, and vegetation and water deities on the brackets of the column capital.

On the eastern coast of southern peninsular India, a type of structural temple developed which played an important part in the evolution of Hindu architecture. This appeared under a dynasty called the Pallavas. The chief characteristics of these temples are that the ground plan of shrine and portico was extended by the addition of a large pillared hall employed as a dance pavilion, sometimes attached to the portico, but sometimes separate. The exterior was adorned with ranges of pilasters, with characteristic around moulded capitals; and at the same time, the moulding of the plinths on which the temple stood, and of the architrave above the pilasters, were very much developed, the latter with a prominent curved drip moulding. The tower ( *Śikhara* ), above the central shrine was usually of a regular pyramidal form, and as developed as a series of miniature blind pavilions.

Opinions are divided as to the origins of this particular temple type, but it seems likely that it originated, actually, at Badami in the Deccan, sometime before 600. The most famous examples of this Pallavan style of architecture are the shore temple at Conjiveram. These buildings are elaborated by the addition of a perimeter wall, faced with pilasters and monldings, ambulatory corridors around the main shrine incorporated into the pyramidal structure, and an entrance hall aligned with shrine and a dance pavilion. The figure sculpture is of a characteristic restrained style, representing iconic figures of single

deities on narrow panels between pilasters; sheer decoration is little in evidence. A number of temples in this style are also to be found in Pattadakal in the Deccan, dating from the 7th century. Modest in size, but exhibiting the same structural characteristics, they are probably derived directly from the Badami originals.

It is necessary to consider in this connection Hindu cave temples cut in the Western Deccan. The earliest of these were a group of small caves at Badami. These are remarkable chiefly for their extremely fine figure and iconic sculpture cut in very deep relief, but also for the elaboration of pillar types and their profiling. The two main groups of Hindu caves are at Ellora and Elephanta. At Ellora in the Western ghats, there is a large number of caves cut over a period of centuries; sixteen are Hindu. They are characterised by the extreme development of dramatic and magnificent figure sculpture. At Elephanta, an island adjacent to Bombay, the great Siva temple of the eighth century is well-known. This is laid out on a cruciform plan with the centre occupied by a free-standing shrine for a phallic emblem set about with colossal guardian figures, while the rear wall is occupied by the well-known Trimurti, a colossal bust representing three aspects of the god Siva, and several large panels representing Siva's legends. Purely decorative carving is almost entirely absent here. The threefold nature of divinity, it should be noted here, occurs in both Hindu and Buddhist doctrine. It is often portrayed in the latter, rarely in the former as in the Trimurti at the temple of Siva, Elephanta. The heads of this colossal bust are identified as the supreme form of Siva in the centre of the three faces; on the right is Siva the destroyer, and balancing it on the left is the face of Uma the beautiful wife, as Shakti.

Temples in north-western and central India suffered great devastation at the hand of Moslem invaders. Among the group of temple that remain is the famous complex of Hindu and Jain structures (10th to 12th centuries) at Khajuraho, in

central India. Three of the twenty-five temples that survive of an original eighty may be specially mentioned : the Khandariya Mahadeva, the Lakshman and the Chausat Yogini. The two former epitomise the highest achievement of the Candella architects, and combine features noted in earlier work. The Khandariya temple is crowned with a massive buttressed spire. There is no intention of searching for structural economy. The spire is an emotional symbol, a vehicle for displaying deep homage to the gods in the form of elaborate craftsmanship.

Let us now turn our searching eyes to Orissa where mainly at the great temple cities of Bhuvaneswara and Puri, with their hundreds of shrines, the Hindu temple developed more conservatively. According to Brahmanical tradition, the Lingaraja temple at Bhuvaneswara, was built in the seventh century, but archaeologists have dated it later. The main *Śikhara* is over 180 feet high, a masterpiece of dry stone masonry. It still shows the vestigial form of the primitive reed-built shrine. As Indian architecture slowly evolved from the reed and timber building to the cave, and thence to the free-standing stone building, it never lost its strong backward-looking tradition. The most famous Orissan temple is that at Kōnarka ( the Black Pagoda, early 13th century ), a huge ruin, never completed. It was conceived as an ambitious plan, the whole building in the form of a chariot dedicated to the sun-god, with six ornamental wheels and colossal carved draught horses and elephants to pull it. Its upper terraces bear colossal free-standing sculptures of musicians, its walls a vast number of figural reliefs, mostly of an extravagant erotic character.

The great temples of southern India are virtually the cities of the gods. For instance, the Madura temple and its massive subsidiary buildings in the temple precinct, is simply a marvel of architectural genius of Hindus during the seventh century. It was at this time that the south Indian architecture reached its apogee. Pillars and intricate stone carving are the characteristics of the south Indian temple. The Cholas who supplanted

the Pallavas in south India were mighty builders. The Dravadian style was developed and almost perfected under them. Perhaps the best example of this style is furnished by the great Saiva temple at Tenjore built by Rajaraja, the Great. The great *Śikhara* consisting of fourteen storeys, rises to a height of 190 feet and is crowned by a massive dome consisting of a single block of stone. The massive building is covered from the base to the top with superb sculptures and decorative mouldings.

Chola art, it should be noted here, is characterised by a massive grandeur. The huge structures were decorated with minute sculptures involving immense labour and infinite pains. As Fergusson very aptly remarked, the Chola artists conceived like giants and finished like jewellers. There are many massive temples in south India with huge gateways, called *Gopuram*. In addition to *Gopurams*, pillared halls and long colonnades were added as new features in the later temples. Modern tourists are struck with awe by the sight of the gigantic temples at Madura, Srirangam, Ramesvaram and other places, with successive enclosures, long courts with a bewildering maze of buildings, thousand-pillared halls and long vistas of covered colonnades which seem to fade into the distance. But most of these temples are of a much later period.

Indian architecture, we might conclude, of whatever date, style or dedication goes back to something timelessly ancient and now outside India almost wholly lost, something which belongs to the past, and yet it goes forward too, though this the rationalistic mind will not easily admit, to something which will return upon us and has already returned, something which belongs to the future. An Indian temple, to whatever god-head it may be built, is in its in-most reality an altar raised to the divine self, a house of the cosmic spirit, an appeal and aspiration to the infinite.

No artistic eye however alert and sensible and no aesthetic mind however full and sensitive can arrive at any real understanding of Indian architecture, if it is attached to a Hellenistic

conception of rational beauty or shuts itself up in a materialised or intellectual interpretation and fails to open itself to the great meaning underlying the temple architecture, it will be best to look first at some work where there is not the complications of surroundings now often out of harmony with the building, outside even those temple towns which still retain their dependence on the sacred motive, and rather in some place where there is room for a free background of Nature. Thus no superficial study or westernized mind can either explain or comprehend the inner significance of Indian temple architecture.

The sculptural art of India is as old as the ancient civilization of this great sub-continent. Function of a sculpture is to translate into stone or bronze his aesthetic ideal or ideas. The sculptors of pre-historic India, demonstrated in their artistic objects unearthed at Mohen-jo-Daro and Harappa a thorough comprehension of both work in round and relief. 'When I first saw them,' remarks Sir John Marshall, 'I found it difficult to believe that they were pre-historic; they seemed so completely to upset all ideas about early art. Modelling such as this was unknown in the ancient world upto Hellenistic age of Greece.' For more than two thousand years after Harappa and Mohen-jo-Daro, India produced no sculpture of great merit. It was only in the historical period, particularly between the time of Ashoka and the Christian era, the great Chaitya Halls and *Stūpas* were built, but they contained no images. The religious symbolism of Buddhist devotion of this period found expression in the sculptures of tree, the *Stūpa* the rail, the horse-shoe ornament and the foot-print.

In order to form a definite idea of the Ashokan sculpture one has to turn his attention to the monolithic pillars, bearing edicts of the great emperor. They are each made of one piece of sand stone, containing lustrous polish. Marvellous engineering and technical skill has been exhibited in chiselling the stone with powerful accuracy. But these too pale into insignificance before the high artistic merits of the figures crowning them. Of

the series the Sarnath pillar is considered to be the best. In this connection the following observation made by no less an authority than Marshall is worth quoting : 'It would be difficult to find in any country an example of ancient animal sculpture superior or even equal to this beautiful work of art, which successfully combines realistic modelling with ideal dignity and is finished in every detail with perfect accuracy'.

Images of Buddha appeared in Buddhist sculpture and received the devout worship of the faithful. As a result of the conquest of north-western India by the Bactrian Greeks, union of Indian and Greek arts was effected and as a result thereof emerged the Gandhara school of sculpture. This art represented mostly images of Buddha and relief sculptures representing scenes from Buddhist texts. Gandhara sculpture aimed at moulding human body in a realistic manner giving accurate physical details. There was a time when it was believed that Gandhara Buddha image served as a model for those executed at Mathura and other places. But there was a sea of difference between the two. The former aimed at delineating anatomical details and physical beauty, while the latter at imparting a sublime and spiritual expression to the figure. Both the schools of Mathura and Gandhara flourished independently. Images executed at Mathura in red sand stone became so popular and famous that they used to be carried to the remote corners of India.

Mathura has proved a large treasure house of ruins during the period covering two centuries, 150 B. C.—A. D. 50. Instead of big railing of Bharhut or Sanchi type, we have at Mathura numerous fragments of smaller railings with sculptures, and quite a large number of images, either detached or engraved in a very high relief on some architectural fragments. The Mathura sculptures are easily distinguished by the material used—a kind of spotted red stone. It is possible to classify the sculptures of Mathura into two chronological periods. The earlier ones are rude and rough works somewhat resembling those of Bharhut, but of a different style, and do not call for any special remark.

The sculptures of the later period possess one distinguished characteristic, viz., the representation of Buddha as a human figure.

The Gandhara school of sculpture have been found in the ruins of Taxila and in various sites in Afghanistan and North-West Frontier Province ( now in Pakistan ). The distinguishing characteristics of Gandhara sculptures were undoubtedly derived from Greek art, or, to be more precise, the Hellenistic art of Asia Minor and the Roman empire, Gandhara art is accordingly known also as Indo-Greek or Graeco-Roman. No doubt this art owed its origin to the Greek rulers of Bactria and North-West India; the technique was borrowed from Greece, the art was essentially Indian in spirit. Thus it should be noted that both the schools of Mathura and Gandhara flourished under the lavish patronage of Scythian Kings.

The classical phase of Indian sculpture began with the Gupta period when the techniques of art were perfected and ideals of beauty are formulated with precision. The stone or bronze images of Buddha images, Siva, Vishnu and other Brahminical gods of the period exhibited charm and dignity, graceful pose and radiant spiritual expression. The Gupta sculptures not only remained models of Indian art in all times to come, but they also served as such in the Indian colonies in Far East. In short, a sublime idealism, combined with a high sense of rhythm and beauty, characterises the Gupta Sculptures, and there are vigour and refinement in their design and execution.

Indian Sculpture, one must not forget, has to be understood in the light of its aesthetic purpose. The dignity and beauty of the human figure in the best Indian statues cannot be excelled, but what was sought and what was achieved was not an outward naturalistic, but a spiritual beauty, and to achieve it the sculptor suppressed, and was entirely right in suppressing the obtusive material detail and aimed instead at purity of outline and fineness of feature.

The mediaveal sculptures may best be studied with reference to the temples which they adorn. There were, besides, isolated images of gods and goddesses, in considerable numbers. There were many local schools with distinctive characteristics, fostered by different ruling dynasties. The medieval sculptures are gradually dominated more and more by religious influence and less by aesthetic ideas. The conception of the image of Nataraja Siva is one of the few valuable contributions of medieval art, specially in South India. Here it should be noted that art in ancient India has in the main been a handmaid of religion. It has ordinarily expressed the prevailing religious faiths and beliefs, and spiritual conceptions and emotions. To understand and appreciate it properly one must have a thorough understanding of the different phases of religious evolution. In earlier periods, however, there was more of really artistic spirit, and the religious ideas were also more compatible with modern aesthetic taste. Some critics of Indian culture have, from their study of ancient and medieval sculptures, arrived at the conclusion that the spiritual urge had sterilising effect. This is far from truth. India's civilization along with her culture, standing in the first rank in the three great arts as in all things of the mind, has proved that the spiritual urge is not sterilising to the other activities, but a most powerful force for the many-sided development of the human whole.

Indian painting is one of the greatest cultural traditions of the world. Painting in India was linked with the ceremonial of love and expressed the warmest emotions through this art, as through dancing. The art of painting in ancient and later India, owing to the comparative scantiness of its surviving creations, does not create so great an impression as her architecture and sculpture and it has been supposed that this art flourished at intervals, finally ceased for a period of several centuries and was revived later on by the Mughals and by Hindu artists who underwent the Mughal influence. This, however, is a hasty view and does not outlast a more careful research and consideration of the available evidence.



It appears, on the contrary, that Indian culture was able to arrive at a well-developed and an understanding aesthetic use of colour and line from very early times and, allowing for the successive fluctuations, periods of decline and fresh outbursts of originality and vigour, which the collective human mind undergoes in all countries, used this form of self-expression very persistently through the long centuries of its growth and greatness. And especially it is apparent now that there was a persistent tradition, a fundamental spirit and turn of the aesthetic sense native to the mind of India which links even the latest Rajput art to the earliest surviving work still preserved at its highest summit of achievement in the rock-cut retreats of Ajanta.

The Ajanta caves have extorted the unstinted admiration of the whole world. Of the twenty-nine caves, sixteen contained paintings which survived, to a greater or less extent, even as late as 1879. Most of these have been destroyed, and the rest are also gradually crumbling to dust. Although some are as old as the first century A. D., most of them belong to the Gupta Age. A fine conception, brilliant colour, and admirable drawing invested these paintings with a unique charm which we can only faintly realise in their present ruined condition. Some fresco paintings of high merit also adorn the caves at Bagh.

India has had a long tradition in fine arts and even in painting the tradition goes back to the pre-Christian era. From the drawings in red pigment of animals and hunting scenes in the pre-historic caves of Singhampur and Mirzapur, it is evident that painting has had a long history in this country. Percy Brown in his *Indian Painting*, has recorded thus : 'There are primitive records of hunting scenes crudely drawn on the walls of a group of caves in the Kaimur range of Central India, while examples of painting of the later Stone Age have been found in excavations in the Vindhya Hills.' The Ramayana, the Vinaya Pitaka refer to *Chitrasalas* which answer to our picture galleries. Fa Hien

and Yuan Chuang describe many buildings as famous for the excellence of their murals.

Ajanta, the earliest efflorescence of Indian painting is magnificent, with a parabolic curve of growth and decay, that spanned a whole millenium. Impulses from Ajanta radiated a far, to the sea-girt islands in the south and east and also to the hinterlands of the continent. The art of fresco painting in the Ajanta caves reached a perfection never surpassed anywhere else. The nobility of the theme, the majestic scope of the design, the unity of the composition, the clearness, the simplicity and the firmness of the line give us an impression of the astonishing perfection of the whole. Religious piety fused architecture, sculpture and painting into a happy harmony. These artists with their deeply religious spirit worked in anonymity. They brought their faith, their sincerity as well as their skill to serve their religion. After this period we had the Mughal and Rajput schools as well as independent developments in the South, in the courts of Tanjore, Pudukota and Mysore. Abul Fazl, writing of contemporary Hindu painting says : 'Their pictures surpass our conception of things. Few indeed in the whole world are found equal to them'.

The purpose of all art is sacramental. In ancient times, art was used not as a means for public enjoyment, but as an accessory to worship. The great displays of sculpture and painting took place in India as in ancient Greece, in temples and were made in honour of the gods. In temples and cathedrals men became conscious of the power of works of art, to quicken their spirits and give dignity and order to their lives. With the Hindus, the arts, mechanical or fine, are for the refinement of the soul. They help fuller understanding of the human spirit and greatly enlarge our capacity for life. He who attains the vision of beauty is from himself set free. In the disinterestedness of aesthetic contemplation, the human spirit is momentarily freed from the inconsistencies and confusions of temporal life.

It has all along been held by ancient Indian sages and seers and poets that music and literature, dance and drama, sculpture and painting are intended to purge the soul of its defects and lead it to a vision of the Eternal. These arts cannot refine the soul unless they spring from the soul, unless the spirit of man raises itself above its usual routine level. The artist is a priest. The aim of art is to capture the inner and informing spirit and not merely the outward semblance. It is by integral insight or spiritual intuition rather than by observation and analysis of given objects that the sculptor or the painter attains to the highest power of artistic expression. Our arts are not concerned with the appearances of the actual. They are directed towards the realization of ideas, of the truth in the objects. Arts do not so much represent as suggest. They do not so much reproduce reality as create aesthetic emotion. They are interested in the spirit of men and things rather than in their material forms.

In all arts we have imaginative creation. It is related of a famous modern painter that when he had painted a sunset, someone said to him : 'I never saw a sunset like that', and the painter replied : Don't you wish you could ?' The artists primary aspiration is for a redeemed world. His mind is not mirror which reflects the glinting surfaces of the given. It is on fire, close to contemplation. Croce is correct when he speaks of 'the artist, who never makes a stroke with his brush without having previously seen it with his imagination'. When the King Agnimitra found the portrait of Malavika lacking in fidelity to the original, he traced it to impaired concentration.

An agnostic and culturally uprooted age cannot hope to acquire that meditative calm which imparted such immanent sublimity to the Ajanta frescoes. Where does lie the significance of Ajanta ? Ajanta stands as a shining symbol of Indian culture in the realms of painting, sculpture and architecture. An outstanding feature of Ajanta art is this that it combines, in its variety of expression, the three vivid art-forms that were so wonderfully, and at the same time so usefully, cultivated in ancient India for elevation of the human soul in its eternal quest for truth. Indeed

the cutting out of the rugged mountain cliffs into beautiful cathedrals (*Chaityas*) and monasteries (*Vihāras*), some of which are considered the most perfect specimen of Buddhist art of India, are admired for their beauty and completeness of architectonic details, require the most consummate knowledge of constructional science.

The carving in them of rhythmic figures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and a various other gods and goddesses, all immensely suggestive of the deepest spiritual moods, expressing religious conceptions and carrying intimations of divinity—the two prominent characteristics of Indian sculpture necessitated a perfect employment of sculptural technique; and the decorating of these caves by paintings frescoed on their walls and ceilings, treating of religious and secular subjects in mystic touches of lines harmonised with certain simple colours, would never have been possible without a complete mastery of the brush. Although each of these art forms is by itself a typical example of the best creation of Indian art, what gives Ajanta its distinct character as a centre of art-culture is the splendid blendings of these art-forms into a unity of artistic conception, the spirit of which pervades the whole atmosphere of shrines and strikes even the most uninstructed visitor with a wondering admiration.

Thus Ajanta stands as the brightest symbol of the spiritual vision in its best and truest perspicacity. And it is, therefore, quite possible that the monk-artists who created Ajanta took to art not for any personal pleasure or as has been commonly supposed, for any express purpose of educating the pilgrims, but primarily for the sake of their own Sadhana, as a course of art, they thought, would help them in attaining to higher stage of spiritual unfoldment. Theirs was, as Sri Aurobindo observes, 'not for arts sake, but art for the Divine's sake.' In fine, Ajanta stands as the monument of India's artistic genius not because of its deathless beauty but because of the spiritual vision, which, according to these artist-seekers, is the best and truest standard for India's age-old culture. The origin of Ajanta art should, therefore, be traced not merely to what it outwardly is, but more

surely to the vision of those nameless artists, and to the way they tried to render that vision articulate on the walls and screens of those holy cave-cathedrals which still bear eloquent testimony to their ardent striving to discover for man the eternal varieties of life. The art of Ajanta in its ultimate analysis unfolds the secrets of the unity of all existence, and it stands as the perfect combination of material beauty and spiritual reality.

It is in search of this magnificent cultural heritage of India that there came here from Ceylon an inspired pilgrim in the first decade of this century who was destined to become one of the high priests of Indian culture and Asiatic thought.

### *CHAPTER THREE*

## **BIRTH AND PARENTAGE**

‘THE CHARACTER of a people is their history as written in their sub-conscious mind and to understand that character, we have to turn on it the limelight of their history. Each nation creates its own symbol and out of it emerges its conception of art which is directly related to culture. The higher the fine arts of a people or a nation, the higher is its cultural level.’

Thus wrote Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy who was born in Colombo on 22 August, 1877 of a Ceylones Tamil father and English mother of Kentish origin. Coomaraswamy was really fortunate in his parents. His father, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, was a great son of Ceylon while his mother, Elizabeth Clay Beeby was considered a very accomplished woman belonging to the upper circles of English Society.

Mutu Coomaraswamy, born on 23 January 1834, hailed from a singularly gifted family of Tamils of Monipay, a village rapidly expanding itself into a flourishing town, five miles from Jaffna.<sup>1</sup> Mutu was the only son of his parents. He was less than three years old when his father died. His mother was an able student of Tamil literature, a religious woman and a lover of music. It was she who contributed considerably to the education of her son. As the family was rich, young Mutu’s education, instead of

1. Jaffna is the northern capital of Ceylon, ethnologically and culturally an integral part of India. According to Sir William Jones, North Ceylon was the abode of the Tamils and the home of the Hindu race. During the more than 130 years of British administration, the Jaffna Tamils played a prominent role in the economic, political, social and cultural life of Ceylon.

being neglected without the guidance of his father, was well provided for. At first he had the benefit of tuition at home from several English tutors, and then attended the Colombo Academy (now Royal College), where he was thought exceptionally brilliant. He studied English, Tamil, Sinhalese, Pali, Latin and Greek, and completed his scholastic career in 1851 by winning the much coveted Turnour Prize<sup>1</sup> awarded by the Government of Ceylon to the best student in Greek, Latin and English classics. Thus he was acclaimed as the best all-round scholar of the year. He also read philosophy under a Christian scholar who was the head of the Scottish Church in Ceylon.

It is on record that young Mutu attracted the attention of the Government, so much so that he received his first Government appointment even before he attained the legal age of majority. As a member of the Ceylon Civil Service he was sent to a district in the Northern Province in Ceylon as Assistant Agent to the Government of Ceylon. But he was not destined to remain as such; he therefore resigned his position after only a few months of service there and, returning to Colombo, articulated himself under Sir Richard Morgan as a student at-law.

After the usual term of apprenticeship Coomaraswamy was called to the Bar as an advocate in 1856 of the Supreme Court. His remarkable talents and his forensic abilities soon won him the leadership among the lawyers of his day and the reputation of 'lion of the Metropolitan Bar'. Even when he was a busy practitioner of the law, Mutu spent all his spare hours in the study of the classics, both Western and Oriental, the metaphysical and moral philosophy of either culture, and at the same time by a study of political history and legislation he prepared himself for active political life. In 1861, following the retirement

1. Created out of the endowment of Sir George Turnour who was a Ceylon Civil Servant. He edited and translated the *Mahavamsa*. Born in Ceylon, Sir George was the first translator, and indeed the resurrector of the *Mahavamsa*, the great Pali Historical chronicle of Ceylon.

of his brother-in-law, the young lawyer became a nominated member of the Legislative Council where he soon made his mark.

His speeches in the Legislative Council, it is on record, were to Ceylonese legislators or parliamentarians what speeches of Gladstone, Palmerston and Disraeli ( They were his English contemporaries ) were to British Parliamentarians in those momentous days.

As a legislator, Mutu Coomaraswamy interested himself not merely in local affairs, but followed international events as well with an understanding spirit. His name became known in Eng'land and France, with the result that friends there invited him to visit their countries. Sea voyage was then forbidden and perhaps Coomaraswamy was the first Ceylon Tamil to visit England. His first visit to Europe lasted three years. His charm of manner and easy and pleasant conversation found him friends and admirers in English society.

In appearance, Mutu Coomaraswamy was a man of distinguished mien. His costume, a long coat of a plain light colour, more often white, extending from the neck down to the knees, with a gold-laced turban on his head of curly hair, made him look very much like a fabled prince of an Eastern land. He wore a gold chain round his neck with a pendent decorated by a star in brilliants. His thick flowing beard reaching almost his chest, his characteristic pose with his left hand resting on the table and his right hand outstretched whenever he emphasized a point in the topic of discussion, his perfect command of the English language, the intonation and modulation of his musical voice presented altogether a vivid personality. As the face is the index of character, so his entire bearing indicated a gentleman of culture and fine taste, with a keen perception of the grand and the beautiful, whether in nature, art or literature.

We gather from the contemporary accounts that much distinction fell to the lot of Mutu Coomaraswamy during his first



visit to England of three years. He was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn, being the first person neither Christian nor Jew to secure the privilege of having his name registered in the Rolls of the Inns of Court. He was elected Honorary Member of the Society of Arts, and was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical and Geological Societies. He was put up for membership of the Athenaeum<sup>1</sup> and elected a member. In December 1863, he was presented to Queen Victoria by Earl John Russell; it was on this occasion that he presented the Queen with a copy of *Arichandra*, which he had dedicated to her.

Returning to his native land, in the middle of 1865 Mutu Coomaraswamy took his seat in the Council. Which marked the beginning of his real career as a legislator, a career which he was to pursue with great distinction for the next decade. He paid his second visit to England in 1874. He was already a familiar figure both in official circles and in the highest circles of English society. Whitehall appreciated his services to the Colony as a Legislator so greatly that without reference to the Government officials in Ceylon, Her Majesty, the Queen conferred on Mutu Coomaraswamy the title, Knight Bachelor, the highest honour which a British Sovereign could reward a Colonial subject in those days. It should be noted here that it was on the recommendation of Disraeli, Prime Minister of England, that Coomaraswamy was Knighted by Queen Victoria. He was the first Ceylonese, may be first Asian to be granted this distinction.

The year 1875 has remained memorable in the life of Sir Mutu. It was on the 18th of March 1875 that he was married to an English lady of Kentish origin, Elizabeth Clay Beeby by name. Miss Beeby was seventeen years younger than her husband, and she was to be widowed five years later, at the age of twenty seven. This instance of inter-marriage between one of the ruling race and one of the ruled race was noticed in some London

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1. The Athenaeum is one of the best known clubs in London. Membership was ( and still is ) a prestige affair; one must have wealth, birth, professional eminence to be recommended for membership.

hapers at the time when it was solemnized at a middlesex Registry Office. Elizabeth Clay Beeby was born in 1852, of an old English family in Kent. She was the daughter of Mr. William John Beeby of Kent, and one of a family of three, having a younger sister and a brother. Sir Mutu's youngest nephew, Arunachalam ( later Sir P. Arunachalam ), then at Cambridge, was one of the witnesses to the Marriage Certificate.

Why did he marry an English woman ? When in England, Sir Mutu had been in the habit of frequenting a chapel where non-denominational services were held. It was in this way that he formed the acquaintance of a young lady reputedly of great beauty. Similarly of tastes and opinions on religious matters helped them to discover in each other the beginnings of deep affection. In taking the bold step of contracting a European marriage, Sir Mutu was aware of the censure, his conduct would receive at the hands of his conservative countrymen, and the danger he would incur by neglecting the social rules of his race. But his excuse was that neither, in India nor in Ceylon was he able to find a young lady of good family and position who was equal to him in mental attainment, so as to help him in the work congenial to his tastes. It is on record that his ambition was to help India and Ceylon by entering the British Parliament and he thought a highly cultural wife would be of great use to him in the work he had proposed for himself. Failing in his endeavour to meet with a native lady of such attainment, he was obliged to think of a European alliance, more especially as he was then past his fortieth year and was everyday feeling that the question could no longer be postponed. Lady Coomaraswamy, on the other hand found her marriage with Sir Mutu was like a bridge of understanding and sympathy.

Soon after their marriage, Sir Mutu fell ill and his life was despaired of; but his health improved and the Coomaraswamys returned to Ceylon. They lived a happy wedded life in a very desirable mansion, 'Rheinland'. On his return to Ceylon Sir Mutu was accorded a warm reception by the Tamils of Colombo.

The couple enjoyed for over three years an idyllic home life at 'Rheinland', the birth place of their only child Ananda who was born on Wednesday, the 22nd August 1877. During these happy years, Sir Mutu was in the best of health, doing his great and memorable work as an Honourable Member of the Legislative Council and respected and honoured by everyone. To the last, Sir Mutu entertained high hopes of fulfilling his ambition of entering Westminster as a Member of the House of Commons. Planning a third visit to England with this objective in his mind, he sent Lady Coomaraswamy and their infant son a few weeks ahead of him, expecting to follow soon.

Lady Coomaraswamy left with the child for Europe in April 1879, her husband expecting to join her soon as the ensuing session of the Legislative Council was closed. Illness prevented him doing so, but he recovered sufficiently to attend, though not with his usual activity, to his council duties during the session. At its end, Sir Mutu's trip was postponed on medical advice in order that he might avoid the rigours of the English winter. He had made every arrangement to leave the island when the disease took an unexpectedly serious turn, and he died on May 4th. We gather from the contemporary records that next day his funeral was largely attended by all classes of the community and deep felt sorrow was exhibited.

Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy was a man of high integrity with a determined will and settled views of life that were all his own. His keen sense of duty, aided by his clarity of vision won him universal admiration. His station and title he owed to the sincere, honest and disinterested service he had done his country. The *Ceylon Patriot* wrote : 'In the death of Sir Mutu the Tamils have lost a man, the like of whom they shall not see any more'.

True Sir Mutu did not live long enough either to fulfil his own hopes or the prognostications of his friends. But it is no disparagement of his career, or his memory, to say that whatever

death deprived him of was more than adequately recompensed by the career and reputation of his son, Ananda Coomaraswamy. In his own time Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy was a doughty exponent of Indian culture and of social reform in Ceylon. That he should be better remembered now as the father of Ananda Coomaraswamy is neither ironic nor strange, for it could be said that the son refining upon what he received, undoubtedly gave the impress of his own genius to his father's original interests.

After her husband's death, Lady Coomaraswamy stayed on in England, with her relatives in Surrey. Sir Mutu was wealthy and left to his widow and son a very considerable fortune on the order of three million U. S. dollars. She decided that returning to Ceylon would be too painful and made her home in England again. Her sister and mother came to live with her. All her thoughts were now concentrated in rearing up her son whom she considered to be a perfect prototype of his gifted father. She kept constant interest in her son and in nothing else. In her old age Lady Coomaraswamy (who became a strict vegetarian following the death of her husband) spent a very quiet life, though her kindness was always evident. She died in her sleep on October 4, 1939, at the advanced age of eighty-eight.

Now a few words about the literary achievements of this outstanding son of Ceylon which are not so widely known here in India. In the short span of life allotted to him, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy read much and widely in English, Tamil and the classics (Sanskrit, Pali, Latin and Greek.) and left behind him imperishable thoughts, whether spoken or written. His published contributions in English through translations of Hindu and Buddhist religious and dramatic literature, together with his unpublished manuscripts,<sup>1</sup> bear unmistakable signs of

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1. Shortly before his death Sir Mutu had begun to work on a book on the comparative civilizations of the East and the West—on contemporary and future contacts between the two. This could well have been his most important work. His whole life seems almost a preparation for the task.

what the world would have gained had not this man's life been cut off so prematurely. The translations at one and the same time keep their fidelity to the original, and reveal the character of the man who rendered the classical works into English.

Coomaraswamy published in 1857 a synopsis of the Saiva Siddhanta, one of the main religious philosophies.<sup>1</sup> His first book appeared in 1863 — a translation of the Tamil play *Arichandra* ( The Martyr of Truth ). Two translations from the Pali were to appear eleven years later (in 1874)—The *Dathavansa* or *History of the Tooth-Relic of Gotama Buddha*.<sup>2</sup> This was dedicated to Sir Walter C. Trevelyan. His next significant work of translation was from the Tamil of Some Hindu philosophical poems by Tayumanavar, acclaimed as the Prince among Tamil Mystical Poets ( 1706-44 ). Sir Mutu wrote a brief Life of Tayumanavar, the Introduction and Notes. 'As a religious and mystic poet', writes the learned translator in the Introduction, 'breathing lofty conceptions he has few equals in any language. Tayumanavar was one of the great Saiva Saints, a passionate seeker after God whose hymns are sung all over Tamil-Nadu, Ceylon, Malaysia and Singapore not only by Hindus but all who spied universalism.'<sup>3</sup>

1. This was serialised in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Great Britain, and subsequently included as an appendix to *Arichandra*.
2. *Dathavansa* : A chronicle of the tooth Relic up to the time of its arrival in Ceylon, was written by Dhammakitti, the first of four scholars bearing this name and famous in Ceylon literature. Sir Mutu was the only person to have translated into English.
3. The author acknowledges his debt to the valuable publication 'The Life and Writings of Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, by S. Dwai Raja Sivgam for most of the materials contained in this Chapter.

#### *CHAPTER FOUR*

### **ANANDA KENTISH COOMARASWAMY**

‘PERHAPS the greatest thing I have learnt is never to think for myself.’ Despite this significant utterance from the lips of one who was destined to become the greatest exponent of Indian art and culture in wider perspectives, the life-story of Ananda Coomaraswamy is worth re-counting just only to become fully conscious about our glorious cultural heritage, which was never properly understood by us.

Sir Mutu died before his son was two years old, and the child was brought up in England by his British mother who survived until 1939 and who had the satisfaction of seeing her scholarly husband resurrected in the achievements of their son who became a world celebrity as an exponent of Indian art and culture in wider perspectives. His given name, Ananda, it may be pointed out here, was in reverence for the young and beloved disciple of Buddha, significant of his birth in an ancient Buddhist country and of his father’s interest in Buddhism. His middle name, Kentish refers to the home country of his mother, like English only more specific. His surname with its honorific ending relates to his distinguished grandfather and his ancient family who were Tamils from southern India. Dr. Coomaraswamy has described them as members of the most enterprising branch of the Dravidian race. The family name, Coomara, was said by Sir Mutu to be taken from the name of the Goddess Coomari whose sanctuary is near cape Comorin, in South India, called by the Hindus ‘Kanya Kumari.’

Who is this Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy ? I had to face this question when I went to Rabindra Bharati University

to deliver my lecture on him in 1968. My answer in a single sentence was put forth in this way: 'He was a Ceylonese of Indian origin born of an English mother, brought up in England and trained in geology. He wrote more than 500 publications on Indian, Indonesian and Asian art during his thirty years association with the Boston Museum, and became its greatest interpreter and also a social philosopher of significance.' The present generation of Indians has but little knowledge about this high priest of Indian culture and life. His appearance was arresting, for he was tall and spare of figure with a leonine head of hair and an ascetic face, usually grave but which on occasion could soften into an engaging smile.

Lady Coomaraswamy was both the father and the mother to her son whom she brought up to the best of the family tradition. Speaking about her mother, the son writes : 'After her marriage with my father, the change from England to Ceylon, I was told by my mother, was good for her. She was delighted with the beautiful, tropical island, the palm-fringed shores before the tropical green-clad mountains that rose above the coast and tropic sea with myriads of sea birds. She deeply interested in Ceylon and India, in their religion, in their culture, and particularly in the people. She was impressed by the charming and intelligent people of my father's family. She had been welcomed with gracious hospitality and met their gentle friendliness with gratitude. When I was two, she planned to take me for a visit to her parents in Kent for the summer. We sailed first from Colombo and my father was to follow. But he died on the day he was to have embarked. The sudden and unexpected death of my father was due to Bright's Disease. My mother stayed on in England, with her relatives in Surrey. She thought that returning to Ceylon would be too painful and made her home in her land of birth. So she stayed in Kent and she never returned. And yet, she always wished to contribute in some way to the better understanding of India, to bring about a deeper appreciation of the religious faith which governed their daily lives, and to increase the mutual friendship of people

throughout the world, and particularly for the Tamils of Ceylon, for whom she had such love and esteem.'

Ananda inherited in full measure all the fine qualities of his parents, particularly of his father. Lady Coomaraswamy's sole thought centred round her son whom she wanted to educate to the best of English tradition. The aunt taught Ananda as a boy. Both his mother and aunt took an interest in science and bought books on the subject, even making little experiments in the evening, on their large kitchen table, Ananda loved to watch — at a safe distance.' He remembered, as a very little boy, a Bunsen burner — it is not known whether or not they had illuminating gas at that time, or burning alcohol. The boy was permitted to sit at the safe end of the table so that he might see operations. Thus was laid the foundation of his scientific aptitude even at that tender age.

Here it should be pointed out that Sir Mutu who was in many ways like Raja Rammohun Roy, the seer and the harbinger of modern India, was also foremost in making a plea for the teaching of modern sciences. How delightful a satisfaction is it to record that Sir Mutu's only son Ananda Coomaraswamy was the first Ceylonese to be awarded the Doctorate of Science by the London University in 1906.

The year in which Ananda was born has remained memorable in the annals of modern Ceylon. It was in this year that the Colombo Museum was established. 'My father had a share in securing the establishment of the Colombo Museum' so said Dr. Coomaraswamy in a speech at the Jaffna Hindu Collage at Jaffna on 14 June 1906. Little did his father imagine that most of the life of his son would be spent in the association of a premier Arts Museum in the States where he went at the age of forty. This chapter of Coomaraswamy's life will be discussed elsewhere in this book.

Ananda who was called 'the pretty little boy', did not return to his native land until nearly quarter of a century after he came to England as a child with his mother. He was



educated first at Wycliffe College, at Stonehouse in Gloucestershire, and later at the University of London. Although, without doubt, the Ceylonese youth felt the all pervading influences of John Ruskin and William Morris in the awakening nineties, his deeper interests were focussed upon science—in particular upon geology and minerology. He studied at the University of London where he gained considerable distinction for this original research in geology and he was awarded a D. Sc. degree.

His mother made sure that Ananda took lodgings a mile from the University, so that he would be obliged to walk every day at least a mile to lectures and back. Again, at a time when Ananda was all absorbed in the study of science, she insisted that he included among his subjects Greek and Latin, on the ground that, you will want these languages some day, and you will be very glad that I insisted on your taking them along with your other studies'. Ananda was indeed glad. Thirty or forty years later he needed them in his work.

At twenty two Ananda contributed a paper on 'Ceylon Rocks and Graphite' to the **Quarterly Journal of the Geology Society** which earned him wide reputation as a very promising geologist years later his discovery of **Thorianite** was acclaimed as a first rate discovery and he would have been a great scientist if he chose to remain as such. But Fate had decreed otherwise as Ananda's subsequent career shows.

Before we proceed further with the account of his life, it would not be out of place here to include a few reminiscences of his classmates. One Crafton E. Gane writes : 'Ananda Coomaraswamy was respected by the boys of the Wycliffe College partly on account of his scholastic ability but not less by his prowess in kicking up his leg level with or above his head. He had his ordinary share of teasing by his schoolmates based in part on his being of different nationality and colour, and to arouse his ire which could only be done in safety when out of reach of his arms and legs. This was only in his first years at school

when his temper was a very quick one. A clear impression remains of his interest and proficiency in the Field Club excursions. Dr. Arthur Sibly led those to gravel beds where 'Ammonities' or similar insignificant terms labelled our findings for the School Science Show cases—here and beside the local streams. Ananda gleaned and gleamed. He left School with the affectionate regard of his contemporaries who have followed his distinguished career with the greatest interest and little surprise'.

W.A. Sibly wrote in the 'Wycliffe Star': A. K. C. was brought to Wycliffe in 1889, when he was twelve years old, and he remained at school for more than six years. Just at first he found adjustment difficult, and there were a few stormy and exciting episodes which older 'Old Wycliffe's will remember, but he soon settled down to play a distinguished part in the life of the School. He was a House Monitor by 1892, and became a Curator of the Field Club and Prefect in 1893, for he had great intellectual gifts. Dr. Arthur Silby fostered his interest in science, and encouraged him to contribute a three-page article to the 'Wycliffe Star'. The article which came out in this magazine in April 1895, was on the Geology of Doverow-Hill. As a boy Coomaraswamy was a great fossil-hunter. During this year he was Head of the School, and on June 4th, in what the *Star* describes as the best debate of the session, he moved in the Literary Society 'that the slaughter of animals for food is neither necessary, beneficial nor right'. He was perhaps the only vegetarian pupil here. It is an interesting comment on this motion that fifty years later he sent his younger son Rama Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy from Boston to Springfield, The vegetarian House at Wycliffe. He left, possibly for a visit to Ceylon, in 1895, but was back again at Wycliffe in 1897, when he played for the 1st Association XI and was commended for his skill at centre-half. Having secured his inter-Arts while still at school, Ananda entered University College, London, and gained his D. Sc., followed by a Fellowship.'

Somerville Hastings writes : 'In 1890 I became a schoolboy at Wycliffe College, Stone-house, Gloucester-shire, and for the first time met Coomaraswamy, I did not come across him very much at first as I was a day-boy and he was a boarder, but we soon got to know each other through our mutual friend, the late F. L. Daniels, of Lightpill, Stroud, and the common interest of the three of us in Geology. The part of Gloucestershire in which Stone-house is situated contains many interesting Geological deposits and the three of us used to spend much of our spare time in the quarries and clay pits. Coomaraswamy was very different from most of other boys at this school. He was much abler and more mature than most boys of his age, the result being that he was a good deal teased, to which he responded actively and forcibly.

'I spent two years at University College and for many months was closely associated with Coomaraswamy. We worked at Botany together and were both greatly influenced by the personality of Professor F. W. Oliver, F. R. S., who taught us Botany, and during a good deal of this time Coomaraswamy and I lived together. At first we lived as paying guests at Halvergate, Edgware, a preparatory school for boys at which my sister was teaching. At that time Coomaraswamy was jollier and more carefree than I have ever known him before or since. We spent most of our time on Botanical work but found numerous opportunities for frivolity of all sorts.

'I remember about this time spending at least one weekend with Coomaraswamy and his mother. Lady Coomaraswamy, at Worpleston, near Woking, Surrey, where he taught me to ride a bicycle. Lady Coomaraswamy was an able and soulful woman who idolised her son. Though of British birth she had taken on the mystic outlook to life of the East. Later Coomaraswamy lived with me in rooms in Hendon, but we were not so happy there. If I remember rightly Ananda left University College before I did and joined the Geological Survey and went to Ceylon. I was still working at Chemistry and he got me to carry out the analyses of a mineral which he had found in Ceylon and

in which he was much interested. After this we gradually lost touch and I doubt if I ever saw him again. It gave me much surprise that he was concerning himself with Eastern art, for I know Coomaraswamy as a scientist only.

Lucian de Silva, another classmate writes : 'Reading of Dr. Coomaraswamy's avowed intention of eventually retiring to a mountain solitude, I was reminded of the fact that he was a recluse even in his student days. It may interest his admirers to know something about his undergraduate period from one who was his contemporary for four or five years.

'Coomaraswamy entered University College, London, a couple of years after me, and I was interested to know that he was a son of the man who had so greatly impressed Moncton Milnes and his friends. But a seniority of two years is a formidable barrier in undergraduate life, and it was made insurmountable by Coomaraswamy's not coming out of his shell. He never got beyond a nodding acquaintance, with casual meetings in the corridors or in Sir William Ramsay's chemical laboratory.

'Coomaraswamy took no part in the social life of the College. He was never seen in the Men's Common Room to which students from all faculties came to talk or to read the newspapers, or to play chess. He never attended the meetings of the Debating Society, or the Literary Society, or even the Philosophical Society. He never contributed to the students' magazine, the University College Gazette, which I edited for two years. He did not attend any of the College dances or dinners. He was glimpsed fleeting along the corridors and stairways, like a 'transient and embarrassed phantom'. Perhaps he could say with Erasmus that he was least alone when most alone. He passed the inter Science in 1899 with honours in Botany. When he graduated B. Sc. in 1900 with first class honours in Botany and Geology, I had completely lost sight of him.'

Dr. Coomaraswamy's first public appointment was as Director of the Mineralogical Survey of Ceylon. It was a Home office appointment at London whence he went to his land of

birth as a youngman of twenty-six. He was in this post from 1903 to 1906. His scientific work was distinguished and exact, but during these years his mind turned increasingly to questions of art and nationalism. According to the *Times* he initiated the movement for national education, the teaching of the vernacular in all schools, and the revival of the Indian culture, and with these objects in view he became President of the Ceylon Reform Society.

During the period he was in the service of the Ceylon Government. Coomaraswamy was becoming acquainted with his eastern heritage of which he had but little or no precise knowledge. He observed the baneful effect of the modern West on the traditional East—an East that was, to be sure, somewhat senile and no longer sure of itself; but the West in question was arrogant in a spiritual ignorance which it mistook for superiority. In fact, life in Ceylon opened his eyes to the withering blight cast upon her native arts and crafts by the invasion of occidental industrialism. Courageously and unequivocally the young Coomaraswamy became the champion of these native cultures and handicrafts which was threatened with extermination by the proselytizing fury of occidental civilization. Thereafter from Ceylon his interests turned to India (without which, as he himself observed, Civilization of Ceylon would scarcely be conceivable) and for some years he was in and out of the sub-continent travelling, collecting artworks (especially paintings) and folksongs, immersing himself in the culture of his forebears, and writing.

Here it should be noted that at twelve, Ananda was not only a brilliant student but also a first rate athlete. His tall and handsome appearance made him attractive. He passed the matriculation examination at the earliest age allowed. When he was eighteen, it is on record that he left the College and went for a visit to his father's family at Ceylon where he was received cordially. As a college student he was awarded several medals and prizes, and after graduating with a B. Sc. and first class

honours in Botany and Geology, he became a Fellow of University College working for his D. Sc. Thereafter he returned to Ceylon in 1903 as a Director of a Survey of the Mineral Resources of Ceylon. There he wrote a series of papers under the title, 'Contributions to the Geology of Ceylon', which he submitted as his dissertation for his doctorate. He also discovered there black, cubic crystals that appeared occasionally in the gem washings, called thorianite, consisting largely of thorium oxides with the oxides of cerium metals and uranium, which explains why it is described as 'remarkable for its radioactivity'. These school years with an emphasis on the sciences and the acquisition of Latin and Greek, French and German, and the development of his extraordinary command of English comprised his western education.

During his stay in Ceylon from 1903 to 1906, Ananda started two societies, the Kandyan Association and the Ceylon Social Reform Society ( 1905-1909 ) for the preservation and promotion of the arts of Ceylon and edited the 'Ceylon National Review' to advance the indigenous culture of Ceylon. He also, with the assistance of his cousin pioneered the Ceylon University Movement. He gave lectures and took part in cultural activities. At the end of 1906 on the termination of his appointment as Director of the Mineralogical Survey, Coomaraswamy left Ceylon and went to India for a three month tour. With his subsequent visits to Ceylon and extended tours in India, his Eastern education had begun. His study of India's languages, art and religious heritage, he continued throughout his life with an enthusiasm, that was inspired by his mother's vision and his fathers example.

It is interesting to note here that though a child of Ceylon, why Coomaraswamy was so much attracted to India? He himself wrote that the more he knew of Ceylon's culture, the more inseparable from India did it appear. Indian culture without Ceylon was incomplete, for in many ways Ceylon was a more perfect window through which to gaze on India's past than any

that could be found in India itself. On another occasion he stated that there was scarcely any part of Sinhālese life or religion or art which was quite comprehensible without reference to India. He considered that the greatness of their civilization dated from the wave of Indian influence which reached Ceylon through Asoka's missionaries. And finally: 'The noblest of Indian epics, the love story of Rama and Sita, united India and Ceylon in the mind of every Indian'. All this shows how inexorably the contacts between India and Ceylon drew Coomaraswamy towards his life work: the study of Indian art and culture. Praising enthusiastically Indian ideals and culture he said: 'The more I know of India, the more wonderful and beautiful appear to be her past achievements. Indian culture is valid not so much because it is Indian as because it is culture.'

The years in Ceylon prepared Coomaraswamy for the mission of his life. Feeling that his future lay in a different field, he left the Ceylon service and went back to England to join the little band of social philosophers led by C. R. Ashbee. It was about this time that he was married to Elhel Partridge who was his first wife. Sister Nivedita was then in London and one afternoon when she was speaking at the Norman Chapel on 'Woman's Ideals in India', Coomaraswamy was present. Earlier he came to be acquainted with her during his first visit to India at the house of the Tagores at Calcutta. As both of them were fellow idealists, Coomaraswamy became very much attracted to her for her love of India and her people.

We would like to make here a short digression, reproducing the impression of Nivedita about Coomaraswamy. She described him as 'tall and lanky and rather graceful—pale olive skin and long broad hands—small very deep set dark eyes and a shag of soft thick black hair . . . His extremely fine and smoothly working mind, which has practised in such different fields as Science and a study of arts and crafts, often loses itself in subtleties that appear as fruitless as those in the Athenasian creed. He

delights in argument, and often calls out for walks or meals at his house—only to get involved in gigantic discussions . . . his nature seems to me to be singularly sweet—entirely in its entire unworldliness—in the **real idealism** they put into their life and the total disregard for convention in its bad sense’.

Three events in his life in 1908 made that year memorable for Coomaraswamy and the art world, namely the writing of a well-illustrated monograph, **Mediaeval Sinhalese Art**, the preparation of a pamphlet,<sup>1</sup> on the aims of Indian art and the reading of a learned paper, ‘The Influence of Greece on Indian Art’ before the International Congress of Orientalists at Copenhagen. Most important of all, Coomaraswamy bought one of the printing presses from Ashbee’s Essex House Press, on which the book **Sinhalese Art** was printed—the printing began in September 1907, and finished in December 1908, the exact date of publication being 19 December. In the course of these fifteen months, several smaller works by Coomaraswamy were produced on the same press.

In January 1909, soon after the publication of *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, Coomaraswamy left for India, where he stayed with Abanindranath Tagore, a nephew of Rabindranath, who was destined to bring about a new era in the field of Indian art. His wife Ethel, remained in England, but there was a temporary halt in the work of the Press. In the summer of 1910, Ethel went out to India also, accompanying her husband in his search for exhibits for the Art Section of the United Provinces Exhibition at Allahabad (1910-11).<sup>2</sup> The following account given by Mrs. Coomaraswamy in course of a letter written to their London friend Mr. Ashbee, will be read with interest by the readers :

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1. this was done at the instance of O. C. Ganguly ( Ardhendra Gangopadhyaya ) the well-known art-critic whom Coomaraswamy came to know during his visit to Calcutta.
  2. Coomaraswamy wrote an account of this exhibition in the **Modern Review** March 1911 in which he characterised it as of ‘special and unexpected interest.’



‘We are travelling from town to town over the north of India inspecting, choosing and rejecting things for the Exhibition... Agra and Delhi are very unspoilt. You get down into the bazars and you are in an India that must be little different from what it has been for centuries. I generally sit quietly in the carriage while Ananda goes into interview people, and just watch the people and absorb it all : It is just wonderful. The women are so magnificent. There is such a sense of leisure in it all. The colouring and dresses are so wonderful — men as well as women. The men are always in fine white muslin, trousers, but trousers which fit and which are beautiful and a long coat embroidered with fine white embroidery, always spotlessly clean. There is a sense of culture which I have never felt anywhere so keenly. You feel you are among people who know what real civilisation means.’

We also gather from the **postscript** added to this letter a fact relating to Coomaraswamy's future plan. It reads thus : ‘Ananda has decided he must live out here. He is really wanted here and one feels what an influence he is here and that he ought to be here... The students worship him wherever he goes and not only the students, there is also a group of very sympathetic Englishmen in Calcutta belonging to the Indian Society of Oriental Art<sup>1</sup> who will do anything for him. He has a big scheme of a National Museum on foot which he hopes will come to something. Anyway whether it does or not he is going to settle in Benares for a time — have a house there and be more there than in England’.

Since the publication of **Sinhalese Art**, the succeeding years witnessed Coomaraswamy's art pilgrimage throughout India. In Calcutta — then the centre of renaissance India — he spent a useful spell as the guest of the Tagores. His lectures on the need for aesthetic and spiritual awakening was welcomed by the enlightened Society of Calcutta. During his tours in

1. This institution came into being as the spearhead of the new art movement in Bengal during the first decade of this century. Abanindrapath Tagore and others belonging to new school of art were associated with it.

India, he was able to acquire representative examples of Indian sculpture and painting. He did his utmost to donate his magnificent collection to a new museum of Indian art, if a building would be constructed by others at India's ancient spiritual capital — Varanasi. The value of the entire collection could not be assessed in terms of money. At any rate the value must have been more than the cost of the building.

But it was a sad sign of those times that no prince or magnate who could afford to accept the offer was inclined to have any truck with a protagonist of the 'Swadeshi' movement disliked by the Government. Here it should be noted that as early as in 1909, in his remarkable **Essays in National Idealism** realizing the havoc wrought upon us by alien influence, Coomaraswamy along with Sister Nivedita proclaimed that 'the only true remedies that can be effectual are the regeneration of Indian taste and the re-establishment of some standard of quality.' The alien government did not see eye to eye with this views of one who was passionately interested in India and her problems. Thus his championship of the Oriental way of life and his criticism of modern European civilisation must have antagonised the then government who did not extend to him any sort of assistance in fulfilling his dream of a national museum. Fortunately for Coomaraswamy an offer came from abroad — from an American art institution which purchased his entire collection and invited the erudite collector to join as a Research Fellow. This was the turning point in his life. So Coomaraswamy went to America and took his seat (1917) in the Art Museum of Boston in Massachusetts. He was associated with this institution for the next thirty years of his life.

Before we conclude this chapter we would like to refer to an important episode of Coomaraswamy's life, which has never been taken into account by those who happened to know him and which is not known to many. His love for India is nowhere so fully revealed as in this incident which had a direct bearing on our national prestige.

When during the early years of the second decade of this century India had the misfortune of being vilified by William Archer in his startling book **Is India Civilized ?**, which drew the attention of three distinguished persons, viz., Sir John Woodroffe, Sir Aurobindo and last but not the least, Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy. Each of them came out with a sharp rejoinder pulverising the dramatic critic who rushed in where angels fear to tread. But it was left to the genius of Coomaraswamy who wrote and published a lengthy article titled 'Abused India Vindicated' in the columns of the London **Times**, exposing the utter hollowness of Archer's book which contained a good deal of hostile and unsympathetic criticism of Indian civilization.

He repulsed the shameless attack of the devil's advocate like a giant, clearing away much of the misconceptions about Indian civilization as prevalent in the western mind. He fully exposed the weakness of Archer's reasoning, its empty noise and violence of its outlook in a manner that still remains unsurpassed. Let us quote here a few lines from the said article :

'We are abused with being wanting in truth, honesty and integrity ; with being avaricious and perfidious ; in short with being void of the noble qualities and generous feelings that ought to adorn a nation. Grave as these charges are they are based upon very slight grounds. A few proud Englishmen, prouder still with the easy conquest of one of the richest countries in the East, devoid, for their ignorance, of all sympathy for us, came in contact with a few designing men who are found in all ages and countries and taking them as types of native character drew the inference so agreeable to their pride that the natives of India are a nation of liars and dishonest men. The tongue of scandal once set in motion is seldom stopped. But it must be stopped to vindicate our position, our honour. Let us tell the proud Europe that it will ever be the boast of Asia to have given birth to all the religions and sublime morality of the world.'

As we read this we are driven to the conclusion that Ananda Coomaraswamy was more Indian than any Indian and

he was always proud to call himself as such. Finally, in the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan : 'Among those who are responsible, not only for the Indian Renaissance but for a new Renaissance in the world, Ananda Coomaraswamy holds a pre-eminent position. He will remain forever a seminal **figure** in our study of Indian Culture.'



*CHAPTER FIVE*  
**HIS LIFE AT BOSTON**

A prophet does not find acceptance in his own country, says the Bible. So was the case with Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy who had to leave India much against his wish. It was through fortuitous circumstances that he found a congenial haven for his activity in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It was so much the better for the cause of Indian art studies because he could not certainly have had scope for the full play of his propensities anywhere else. During his tours in India he was able to acquire quite a large number of representative examples of Indian sculpture and painting.

In 1917 Coomaraswamy was appointed a research fellow at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which also purchased his large art collection, the fruits of his ten years travel in India. Subsequently he became the keeper of its Department of Indian, Persian and Mahomedan Art and made it the sanctuary of some of the masterpieces of Asian paintings, sculptures, ceramics, jewellery etc. It was about this time that he married an Argentinian, Dona Luisa by name, who was a scholar in her own right, and who was his second wife. When after three years of service under Ceylon government, Coomaraswamy decided to dedicate himself to the study of art, he certainly took a very bold step in his life. One might ask, how did he come to be a votary of art, and finally an art-historian? It was the heritage of his birth. This decision was the turning point in his career, and since then the study of art fully absorbed his mind and intellect.

Let us now have a glimpse of Coomaraswamy's life in America where he spent the most creative phase of his life as

an interpreter of Indian aesthetics. In one sense we can say that his genius was first recognized, at least in tangible terms, in that distant land. He was honoured by the Trustees of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. They appointed him Curator of the Asian Collection of that Museum, a post which he held until his death in 1947. The post, it should be pointed out, was less a job than a gift to a genius, requiring little more of him than that he pursue his ceaseless research. It is on record that when he retired from the service, the Trustees of the Boston Museum offered him a considerable salary with few demands on his time.

The following account of his life in America will be read with interest :

‘Throughout his life in America, in his lecture tours and all his public contacts, Coomaraswamy was lionized as the man who explained the meaning of the Oriental culture to America. This may explain why he chose to live in my country. For America nurtured him, nourished him, not only in his routine daily needs, but in his spirit. True, Coomaraswamy was always the first to attack the materialism of industrial societies, especially as he saw it eating into the fabric of life in the East. At the same time he was content in America ; he understood the real meaning of material things in the U. S. . . . Coomaraswamy’s development from 1917 to 1947 took place in the years of America’s fruition. In this dynamic context his genius flexed its muscles, measured itself, and sought its own greatness.

‘It may not be amiss to inquire in our minds as to what Coomaraswamy knew, what he saw of America. First, he knew Boston. Boston was perhaps the best city for him. It has always been one of the great intellectual centers of America, and the one with the closest ties to Europe. With its powerful concentration of great universities like Harvard, MIT Radcliffe and Tufts, to mention a few, with its museums, with its superb symphony orchestra, Boston stands high among the cities of America. But Coomaraswamy saw beyond Boston. He saw the

new nation. Yet he saw it in special years ;indeed his experience spans some of the most vivid moments in American history..... In short, he was able to observe the phases through which the country passed on its way to becoming a new nation, assimilating the ideals and goals of socialism into a healthy and functioning economy and creating of new kind of ism, as yet unnamed.

‘Coomaraswamy in America was like a fish in water. There he was able to reach his highest genius, his most vital goals, to attain that Will to Power which he so carefully distinguished from the Will to Govern. In America he found a life not outside of, but beyond politics. He found in America a sympathetic and fertile ground for scholarship. What he found most of all in America, a place where he could develop his own individuality to its fullest extent.’<sup>1</sup>

Here is another account of Coomaraswamy’s life in America:

‘Upon completion of cataloging the Boston Meseum’s important collection, Coomaraswamy was persuaded to remain on the staff of the Museum as Keeper of the Indian and Mohammedan collection; and because of his post with the Boston Museum their collections have grown and become among the finest and most important in the country, indeed equalling the collections of England. Much of his time at the Museum was spent in writing and delivering on occasional lecture for students of Oriental art and philosophy at New York University. Later he was given the higher post of Fellow for Research in Indian, Persian and Mohammedan Art. During this period his scholarly works of philosophical, ethical and religious studies flowered into full bloom.

‘Much of his life in America was spent in Boston and Needham. It was untill after he had lived and worked in America for some time did he feel the need to be closer to nature. While he was living in New York, he was briefly interested in

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1. ‘Coomaraswamy and America,’ an article by Richard T. Arundt, included in S. Durai Raja Singam’s commemoration Volume on Coomaraswamy.



the American scene as we think of it today. Nevertheless he was much interested in the life and culture of American Negro as well as American folk music that attracted Coomaraswamy. He spent less than a decade of his seventy years in his native land. This perhaps was as it should have been, for in America, he was more able to fulfil his mission in the world as scholar, curator and priest of Oriental art.<sup>1</sup>

One of the memorable events in the life of Ananda Coomaraswamy while he was in America as the keeper of the Boston Museum, was the visit of Rabindranath Tagore on the occasion of the poet's exhibition of his paintings at New York in 1930. His brilliant and sensitive assessment of Tagore paintings will be understood from the illuminating Foreword he wrote to the souvenir published on this occasion.<sup>2</sup> His association with the Poet dates back to 1909 or thereabout when Rabindranath came to London to give a performance of a play that he had written, which was in support of the Indian Nationalist cause. Ananda Coomaraswamy along with other celebrities of London was present at this performance. Later on he must have visited the Jorasanko house which he always recognised as the citadel of cultural awakening. In this connection the following account from the pen of the Poet's son will be read with interest.

'The memory of many an unforgettable evening in this room comes back to my mind. There would be a few lovers of art and music reclining in meditation poses on spacious divans, with lights dimmed, listening to the melodious strains of the *Vesna*. On such memorable evenings I would sit in an obscure corner and silently watch the company which very often included such foreigners as Count Keyserling, William Rothenstein, Kakuzo Okakura and Ananda Coomaraswamy... Previous to this he had encouraged father to have his works translated into English ... The picturesque figure of Ananda Coomaraswamy,

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1. Coomaraswamy and 'America', by William E. Ward, included in the same Commemoration volume.

2. See Appendix I : 10.

prominent in most social gatherings in London during the period, added to the charm of the artistic life of the city. He was much in demand for giving talks — and he could talk fluently and impressively on any subject dealing with art',<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years of Coomaraswamy's scholastic life was spent under the roof of a museum. Therefore his views on the function of a museum is worth knowing. He was invited by the American Association of Museums to deliver a lecture in May 1941. The subject matter of his lecture was 'Why exhibit works of art?' and we quote the following passage which the curators of museums throughout the world might read with interest even today.

'It is unnecessary for Museums to exhibit the work of living artists, which are not in imminent danger of destruction; or at least, if such works are exhibited, it should be clearly understood that the Museum is really advertising the artist and acting on behalf of the art-dealer or middleman whose business it is to find a market for the artist; the only difference being that while the Museum does the same kind of work as the dealer, it makes no profit. On the other hand, that a living artist should wish to be 'hung' or 'shown' in a Museum can only be done to his need or his vanity. For things are normally made for certain purposes and certain places to which they are appropriate, and not simply 'for exhibition'; and whatever is thus custom-made, i. e., made by an artist for a consumer, is controlled by certain requirements and kept in order. Whereas, as one curator has recently remarked, 'Art which is only intended to be hung on the walls of a Museum is one kind of art that need not consider its relationship to its ultimate surroundings. The artist can paint anything he wishes, and if the Curator and Trustees like it well enough they will line it up on the wall with all other curiosities.'<sup>2</sup>

1. On the Edges of Time : Rathindranath Tagore

2. This lecture which came out afterwards in the book form for the same title—Why Exhibit Works of Art? This constitutes an important work of this great art-historian.

Thus Coomaraswamy imparted a new substance and content to the traditional concept of running a museum and he has left a rich legacy of his experience in this field. We have seen that from 1917 until 1947 ( the year of his death ) Ananda Coomaraswamy was with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, as a research fellow in Oriental art, building up its unsurpassed department of Indian art, collecting, interpreting, expounding to museum curators the traditional philosophy of life and the function of art in human society, demonstrating that all significant expressions, whether in the crafts or in games and other play are varying dialects and symbolic activities of one language of the spirit. His long association with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts gave him a rare insight as to the utility and function of an art museum. His views on the subject have not lost their value even today. This is but one aspect of his genius.

His life in Boston was crowded with events—events mostly in the nature of delivering lectures before the learned societies as well as universities. In the year 1942 he was invited by the American Oriental Society to deliver a series of lectures. He chose a new subject, viz., ‘Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian theory of Government’. This particular lecture was highly appreciated.<sup>1</sup>

While in America Coomaraswamy was fully engrossed in writing books after books which earned him wide recognition as an art historian and at the same time they opened our eyes to our art heritage. His first book ( which I hold as his best ) **Mediaeval Sinhalese Art** is a masterpiece not only of prose and assembling of material in an encyclopaedic fashion but of excellent design. In the estimation of some distinguished critics like William E. Ward and others ‘this project was more than the mere writing of a text on Sinhalese decorative art; it is the expression of a creative artist masterfully presenting in all its refinements a work of art to be treasured by connoisseurs and

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2. Extract from this lecture are given in Appendix I : 415

scholars alike.' This is the work of a man who has caused the East to stir and take inventory of its accumulated inherited cultures. Again, this was the first of 500 publications to come from his pen afterwards. In a subsequent chapter we shall discuss this particular aspect of Coomaraswamy's genius.

When India attained her Independence in 1947, Coomaraswamy delivered a significant address in Boston, much of which is still valid today. I quote here a few lines. 'Our problem is not so much of rebirth of an Indian culture as it is one of preserving what remains of it. The culture is valid for us not because it is Indian as because it is culture ... Freedom is the opportunity to act in accordance with one's own nature. But our leaders are already denatured -- Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.' On August 15th, 1947 at the Independence Day celebrations at Boston, he unfurled the flag of India, for on that day he saw the fulfilment of a cherished dream of his -- such was Coomaraswamy's love for India.

Again, on his seventieth birthday, in reply to a function, Coomaraswamy said: 'This is my seventieth birth day and my opportunity to say: Farewell. For this is our plan, mine and my wife's to retire and return to India next year thinking of this as going home ... We mean to remain in India, now a free country.' The concluding lines of his reply reveals to us another Coomaraswamy and as such it is worth quoting here. He said: 'I have not remained untouched by the religious philosophies I have studied and to which I was led by way of the history of art. In my case at least, understanding has involved belief; and for me the time has come to exchange the active for a more contemplative way of life in which it would be my hope to experience more immediately, more fully, at least a part of the truth of which my understanding has been so far predominantly logical ... May I know and become what I am, no longer this man so-and-so, but the self that is also the Being of all beings, my Self and your Self !'

I have the authority of Dr. Radhakamal Mukherjee ( who met Coomaraswamy at Boston just a few months before his death ) to state that both the husband and wife had expressed their willingness to return to India. 'Mukherjee, do you think you would be able to find out a solitary place for us somewhere below the Himalayas where I can spend the rest of my life as a forest recluse,' so said the man who, three decades ago, had wanted to settle at Varanasi -- the place he liked most in India. Returning to India Dr. Mukherjee had contacted C. B. Gupta, the then Chief Minister of the Uttar Pradesh and informed him about the last wishes of the self-exiled hero. Then a place was arranged for Coomaraswamy at Almora and this was duly intimated to him by Dr. Mukherjee. It was a sort of donation to the great savant and patriot who always regarded himself as an Indian. Everything was settled; plans were laid out for the construction of the building where the couple would stay. Coomaraswamy had intended to return to India along with his library which he had built up during the period he lived at Boston. Those who had the privilege of seeing this library have expressed it contained vast and rich collection of books pertaining to art, architecture, religion, science and philosophy. His collection also contained some manuscripts which Coomaraswamy had procured during his sojourn in India. But this was not to be, for he died at Needham, Massachusetts, on September 9th, 1947, leaving a widow, two sons and a daughter, and a record and a reputation in their several ways unique. Thus was hushed for ever the voice that expounded the mystery of life and death to millions of souls. Coomaraswamy did not return, but his ashes returned to India and they were immersed in the holy waters of the Ganges at Banaras, according to his last wishes.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE WRITINGS OF COOMARASWAMY

Thirty years have passed since the demise of Ananda Coomaraswamy and a whole generation has grown up in our academic circles knowing little of the encyclopaedic work of this colossus. One comes across bibliographies printed in the books of Indian Art and Culture by some recent authors where the pioneer publications of Coomaraswamy are sadly missing, and many people have come to bracket the name of Coomaraswamy, with the curators of museums or with 'art-critics' and nothing more. The urgency of acquainting our 'modern-educated' Indians with the momentous writings of Coomaraswamy cannot be exaggerated. One of the main reasons for our ignorance of Coomaraswamy's work is that his books and monographs have not been easily available to readers, and few libraries have anything more than a handful of his writings; while book sellers have capitalised from the stray items of Coomaraswamy available here and there. To glance at his career and work is to marvel that so much could have been achieved in a single lifetime. The fact that no significant volume has yet appeared on the life and work of so extraordinary a person is a sad commentary on present-day Indian scholarship. He worked quietly, avoiding the glare of publicity and disdaining adulation. His self-effacement almost bordered on anonymity and his published works give only an incomplete indication of his contribution to the world of art and thought. Indeed, as a thinker he was original and as a writer unique. 'No other living writer', observes a critic, 'has written the truth in matters of art

and life and religion and piety with such wisdom and understanding.'<sup>1</sup> Truly so.

It is generally believed that all that Coomaraswamy wrote consisted only of books on art and art-history. But it is far from truth. The range of his interests was indeed very wide. Turning from art and aesthetics to philosophy and religion, we have an equally rich harvest. Such works as **The Pertinence of Philosophy** and others reveal his deep insight into pure philosophy, while his **Dance of Siva** and other works show an equally profound knowledge of comparative religion. And the works entitled **Eastern Wisdom and Western Thought**, **Message of the East** etc. are devoted to the history of civilisations and culture-patterns. In addition to the briefer essays he wrote full-length works on Hinduism and Buddhism marked by great originality of interpretation.

Again, in spite of his lifelong pre-occupation with cultural studies, Coomaraswamy was not indifferent to social, political and educational problems. His writings on these subjects reveal complete familiarity with the social sciences. Whether we read his **Domestic Handicrafts**, or his **Swadeshi, True and False**, we find an equal command of the material handled. Even in his educational writings, such as, **Education in Ceylon**, **The Bugbear of Illiteracy** and **Young India** we find a brilliant application of his fundamental views on cultural questions.

In estimating the work of Coomaraswamy as represented by these writings and by other numerous essays on poetry and music not mentioned above, three further considerations must be kept in mind. In the first place, there are subjects on which he did not write separate books but which he mastered so thoroughly that his knowledge of these is fully reflected in his writings. One such was philosophy. In a number of essays on art and philosophy he has gone deep into the etymology of important words in Sanskrit, Latin, Greek and even Chinese. A life-long study of philology is woven into the fabric of his sentences. Secondly, the value of his work is to be judged not only on the

1. Autobiography : Eric Gill.

basis of the texts but on that of the foot-notes as well. These abound in parallels and comparisons drawn from varied sources. Sometimes, a single footnote contains ideas that might well yield material for an entire volume. Thirdly, it must not be forgotten that Coomaraswamy left an enormous amount of unpublished works behind. When they see the light of the day, his posthumous publications may safely be expected to enhance his already enviable reputation as a scholar, connoisseur and thinker.

Unlike many other men of erudition, Coomaraswamy was not indifferent to stylistic requirements. His work was so intrinsically solid that it did not stand in need of any wordy embellishments. His pen was an instrument of precision, and what is more, he was always conscious of the value of words and varied his manner skilfully in accordance with the subject. The most striking quality of his writing is its incisiveness and the impression of authenticity that it conveys. He throws into every paragraph the weight of his profound scholarship and drives home his point effectively. His assertions are backed by a vast array of facts and quotations. Sometimes, particularly when he seeks to bring out parallel lines of thought, these quotations, are so aptly chosen and so vigourously employed that all resistance on the reader's part is made impossible. It is true that in certain cases he simply overwhelms us with citations. They follow each other in such quick succession that we are bewildered. But even at such moments we never doubt that the author is trying to expound, not to impress.

In his treatment of the hybrid culture of Anglicised Indians, Coomaraswamy is vehement and unsparing. One of his earlier works, viz., **The Message of the East** is an instance to the point. How he regretted the degradation of India has been fully reflected in this little volume. From his point of view the whole **Swadeshi** movement as it was then directed, made not for the elevation, but for the degradation of India, not for restoring national life but for destroying all that gave any



ground for hoping that India will one day proclaim her message to the West. Here are a few lines from this book : 'Go into a Swadeshi shop, you will not find the evidences of Indian invention, the wealth of beauty which the Indian craftsman used to lavish on the simplest articles of daily use ... You will not find these things but you will find every kind of imitation of the productions of European Commerce, differing only from their unlovely prototypes in their slightly higher price and slightly inferior quality.'

The idea of realising national self-consciousness — to use a phrase then much loved by ardent politicians — by the manufacture and sale of dingy grey shirtings, or materials coloured with loud aniline dyes or travelling trunks painted with every colour of the rainbow, seemed to Coomaraswamy, a wild absurdity over which he hardly knew whether to smile or to weep. Such a grotesque ideal could not, he asserted, have been conceived by men who understood and loved India.

Commenting on this book, a Calcutta paper wrote :

'We shall be much interested to see what reception will be given to the eloquent and forcible little volume which the distinguished Indian art critic, Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy, has just published under the title of **The Message of the East**. This scholarly thinker and lover of art finds little to please him in the present condition of India. He sees the politicians in the ascendancy and most of them afflicted with the delusion that if India is to be regenerated she must work out her salvation by competing with Manchester in the manufacture of cheap cotton goods or by the indigenous production of matches, soap and fountain pens.'<sup>1</sup>

The book ends with this significant remark : 'The congressmen who claim to feel the pulse of the Indian people and to be promoting their interests should be told that the loss of beauty in our lives is a proof that we do not love India, for

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1. Extract from an editorial in the Statesman, September 22, 1909. See Appendix II.

India, above all nations, was beautiful not long ago. It is the weakness of our national movement that we do not love India.' This is plain speaking and it contains a large measure of truth.

In his remarkable **Essays in National Idealism**, realising the havoc wrought upon us by alien influence, Coomaraswamy proclaimed that 'the only true remedies that can be effectual are the regeneration of Indian taste, and the re-establishment of some standard of quality.' Thus he never believed in the 'civilising mission' of Europe. This is why he was always emphatic and critical in all his writings relating to the period of political resurgence in India during the first decade of this century in spite of his full sympathy with it. But he is not always aggressive or emphatic. For instance, when Coomaraswamy describes a Buddha statue, his style is dignified, reverential. In the **Dance of Siva** there are many passages of singular beauty. His prose conveys with remarkable power the cosmic energy of Siva : the phrases are vibrant, almost awe-inspiring. His renderings from the Sanskrit are remarkable and one is convinced that no other words could possibly have been chosen.

His productivity as an author in an abstruse field was phenomenal, and by his writings, by his lectures far and wide, and by his voluminous correspondence with scholars throughout the world, Coomaraswamy established for himself an international reputation as a scholar and an author. It is no exaggeration to say that the world at large profited by his phenomenal scholarship, his penetrating understanding and his graceful literary style. Certain of his publications, namely the **Dance of Siva** and other early essays—are already classics. Coomaraswamy's typically scholastic writings and their revelation of truth, the succinctness of his statements are too well known and appreciated by all Indian scholars to need any further recapitulation or comment here. But special mention should be made of his one particular work, viz., **The History of Indian and Indonesian Art** (1927) which is his chief contribution to the study of Indian art in its historical, sociological and philosophical

context. Beginning with the Indo-Sumerian finds, it gives a clear and connected historical account of the entire history of Indian and Indonesian art. This work has been rated by his critics as the best.

His publications brought fame not only to Coomaraswamy but also to the Boston Museum with which he was associated for thirty years. The following extract from the seventy second Annual Report will be read with interest : 'The staff of the Museum suffered the loss through death of Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. He had been a member of the staff for thirty years and he and Dr. Denman W. Ross were chiefly responsible for the extremely distinguished Indian collection which is one of the ornaments of the Museum. Dr. Coomaraswamy had also achieved great distinction for the Museum by his publications and his world-wide reputation as a scholar. If the Museum's Indian collection holds an enviable position, it is in large measure due to Coomaraswamy's endeavours'. In his later years as Fellow for Research he was engaged in writing book after books on varied subjects, which appeared in print in many countries. Thus by his numerous contributions to the world of learning Coomaraswamy has left a lasting monument to himself.

He came to India at a comparatively young age to make that profound study of its art, literature and beliefs which was the basis of some of the best books ever written in any language to interpret the East to the West and the West to itself. While still a student in London, Coomaraswamy had made a similar study of the arts and crafts of Ceylon—the land of his birth—a monumental thesis which was later published as the classic **Mediaeval Sinhalese Art**. Works like **Aims of Indian Art**, which caused a furore among the world's leading orientalists by denying an accepted belief that Indian art owed anything to Greek influence. 'The Indian craftsman', 'Essays in National Idealism', 'Selected Examples of Indian Art', 'Indian Drawings' and a few other works followed in quick succession.

One great characteristic of the writings of Coomaraswamy is this that the mind he turned upon life was insatiate, roving like a bee to suck the essence of every blossom of thought or fancy, but unerringly making a bee-line to bear back honey to his wisdom's hive. His was a wisdom engendered of the world's best. The East and the West were conjoined in him; so that he achieved a detachment born of their conflict, and an understanding born of their fusion. He could examine each without passion, love both without blindness. The spirit is the essential aspect in man — this truth is clearly reflected in all his works and essays, and this has imparted a sort of perennial value to them. This perhaps accounts for the influence of his writings felt throughout the world, especially among the Indologists and art-historians.

We have many teachers who have spoken to us of the past, but very few who have taught from the point of view of the perennial. But it is the universal scholarship of one man, controlled by his own sure eye for the significant, and made eloquent by a majestic understanding of the universal speech of traditional myth and art, that has performed the giant's task of bringing together the fragments of our single, great human heritage, and re-awakening the life-illuminating Form. People have compared Coomaraswamy's many-faceted genius to that of Leonards da Vinci and hailed him as the world's greatest orientalist. His mind, Dr. Radhakamal Mukherjee once told me, was one of the few, perhaps the last one, to span not only the bridge of time between antiquity and the present, but also the oceans of space between Asia and America. As in all great individuals, there was in him a transcendent power. When surveying the writings of such a man as Ananda Coomaraswamy, one is reminded of how superficial are the differences that separate mankind, and how fundamental the likenesses, or rather identities, that make us one. It is in this sense that this child of Ceylon was more Indian than any Indian. He belonged to us all, East and West alike.

To give an idea of the penetrating wisdom which Coomaraswamy brought to the study of the human condition, we need only quote one passage from his prolific writings which is as valid today as when it was written some sixty years ago :

‘ We may not shirk our past in the re-organisation of life, which is needed to make life tolerable under changed conditions. It is for us to show that industrial production can be organised on socialistic lines without converting the whole world into groups of state-owned factories. It is for us to show that great and lovely cities can be built again, and things of beauty made in them, without the pollution of the air by smoke or the poisoning of the river by chemicals, for us to show that man can be master, not the slave, of the mechanism he himself has created.

It is for us to proclaim that wisdom is greater than knowledge; for us to make clear anew that art is something more than manual dexterity, or the mere imitation of natural forms. It is for us to investigate the physical and supersensual faculties anew in the light of the discoveries of Physical Science and to show that Science and Faith may be reconciled on a higher plane than any reached as yet. It is for us to intellectualise and spiritualise the religious conceptions of the West, and to show that the true meaning of religious tolerance is not the refraining from persecution, but the real belief that different religions need not be mutually exclusive, the conviction that they are all good roads, suited to the varying capacities of those that tread them, and leading to one end’.

‘ Leading to one end’ — such was the concept of Coomaraswamy which finds appropriate expression in all his writings. from aesthetic through linguistic on to metaphysics was a majestic progress possible only to one who was firmly attached to the spiritual view of ‘the unity of all life—one source, one essence and one goal.’ What he said of **Silpacharya** Abanindra-

nath Tagore and his school, Coomaraswamy may have subconsciously felt, was true of himself : ' It has proved impossible for those who have not seen the ancient gods to represent them : and the powers to be are not yet seen or heard, only the movement of their dance is faintly felt.' Nevertheless, he looked forward with confidence to the day when the world should find peace and spiritual renewal in the Perennial Philosophy. All his writings proclaim silently but in forceful words that Ananda Coomaraswamy is the prophet of reintegration of humanity, the herald of a new Renaissance.

When we turn to his writings on subjects relating to art and culture of India, we find that though Ceylonese by birth Coomaraswamy was virtually Indian, so thoroughly was he steeped in Indian culture and thought. His knowledge was not acquired as by an outsider but gained as one native to the soil. To this he applied a rare detachment, due in large measure to his scientific education. But he did not treat his data in a mere mechanical spirit. He tried to understand with sympathy the deeper meaning underlying facts and correlate it to the evolutionary processes that went to form the ideals and aspirations of the people. His exposition therefore possesses a unique value. His writings belonging especially to this category clearly indicate that Coomaraswamy was never concerned with defending the traditions of hieratic schools but with interpreting the realities which formed the foundations of Indian artistic and cultural achievement.

As everybody knows, his studies were not confined to India only. His knowledge of other cultures gave him a breadth of view, a totality of vision, and against this wide background Coomaraswamy was quick to grasp the immense importance of India's contribution to world civilization. Finding that Indian ideals and thought were not only not understood by the politically dominant West but unjustly belittled and to some extent vilified even by men having pretensions to culture ( Ruskin and Birdwood are the examples ), he directed all his writings to two purposes : first, to combat the unfairness of criticism by

Western writers, and second, asking *Indians to shake themselves free from European standards and stand on the intrinsic worth of their own culture.* He succeeded in both.

It was Coomaraswamy who set himself to fulfil this task with a single-minded devotion and energy which were indeed remarkable. And it is owing to him that India occupies its deserved position on the cultural map of the world. As one reads his works, one is driven to the conclusion that Coomaraswamy has not only saved from oblivion inestimable values but given self-respect and dignity to Indians whose forbears left such a priceless heritage for humanity. India has therefore reasons to remain grateful for ever to one whose real grasp and understanding of our culture earned him the reputation as 'the priest of Indian art'.

Those who have gone through his works carefully will agree that Coomaraswamy's style has all the marks of strength and beauty, balance, emphasis, clarity and simplicity. By his presentation of Indian art and the singular manifestations of the Indian mind, he raised high the tattered standard of Indian art. He taught us more than anybody else the place of art in the evolution of the race and its value in the education and actual life of a nation. Speaking about the characteristics of his writings a noted critic observes: 'Though Coomaraswamy wrote much, he always wrote well. A master of the aphoristic style, in his discourse he blended thought and feeling, poetical fervour and lucid exposition.'

As an instance of it we can refer to his description of Borobudur: 'The rich and gracious forms of these reliefs, which if placed end to end would extend for over five kilometers, bespeak an infinitely luxurious rather than a profoundly spiritual experience. There is here no nervous tension, no concentration of force to be compared with that which so impresses the observer at Angkor Wat. Borobudur is like a ripe fruit matured in breathless air, the fullness of its forms is an expres-

sion of static wealth, rather than the volume that denotes the outward radiation of power.'<sup>1</sup>

This is poetry presented in the golden casket of keen observation of one who by his lifelong study and observation fully realised the twin ideals of harmony and truth in all Indian art.

1. History of Indian and Indonesian Art : Coomaraswamy





## CHAPTER SEVEN

### HIS CONCEPT OF INDIAN ART

Ananda Coomaraswamy brought to the study of Indian life and art a sound knowledge of western education and social science, and an unsurpassed enthusiasm of devotion to the ideals of the country he loved most. Through his works and essays he became not merely an interpreter of India to Europe, but even more, the inspirator of a new race of Indian students, no longer anxious to be anglicised, but convinced that all real progress, as distinct from mere political controversy, must be based on national ideals, upon intentions already clearly expressed in religion and art.

This may be regarded as Coomaraswamy's approach to Indian art, the glory of which was so long lost to us. Indeed he may be regarded as a trailblazer, for it is through his books that we have learnt to look at the aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual aspects of Indian art. The mystery, imagination, symbolism, iconography and science of aesthetics were aspects of Indian art into which he had deeply penetrated and had an inordinate pride in the cultural nationalism of India. It was Coomaraswamy who opened our eyes to the supremacy of Indian art. In this chapter we intend to discuss his concept of Indian art in its entirety. But before that we would like to examine some of his views on the fundamentals of art, which the learned scholar has discussed at length in his **Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art** (formerly titled **Why Exhibit Works of Art ?** ).

'We are familiar', writes Coomaraswamy, 'with two contemporary schools of thought about art. We have on the one hand

a very small self-styled elite which distinguishes 'fine' art from art as skilled manufacture, and values this fine art very highly as a self-revelation or self-expression of the artist; this elite, accordingly, bases its teaching of aesthetic upon style, and makes the so-called 'appreciation of art' a matter of the manner rather than of the content or true intention of work. These our professors of aesthetics and of the History of Art who rejoice in the unintelligibility of art at the same time that they explain it psychologically, substituting the study of man himself for the study of man's art; and these leaders of the blind are gladly followed by a majority of modern artists, who are naturally flattered by the importance attached to personal genius'.<sup>1</sup>

According to Coomaraswamy, the work of art is the unconscious expression of a state of mind and art is nothing tangible. We cannot call a painting 'art'. As the words 'artifact' and 'artificial' imply, the thing made is a work of art, made by art, but not itself art; the art remains in the artist and is the knowledge by which things are made. What is made according to the art is correct; what one makes as one likes may very well be awkward. We must not confuse taste with judgment, or loveliness with beauty.

Coomaraswamy does not like to separate art from culture and this is why he always asserts that 'we must not divorce work from culture, and to think of culture as something to be acquired in hours of leisure; but there can be only a hot house and unreal culture whose work itself is not its means; if culture does not show itself in all we make, we are not cultural. We ourselves have lost this vocational way of living and there can be no better proof of the depth of our loss than the fact that we have destroyed the cultures of other peoples whom the withering touch of our civilization has reached.

1. See Appendix I : 9

'To say that art is essentially a matter of feeling is to say that its sufficient purpose is to please ; the work of art is then a luxury, accessory to the life of pleasure. The purpose of art is to reveal a beauty that we like or can be taught to like; the purpose of art is to give pleasure ; the work of art as the source of pleasure is its own end ; art is for art's sake. We value the work for the pleasure to be derived from the sight, sound or touch of its aesthetic surfaces ; our conception of beauty is literally skindeep ; questions of utility or intelligibility rarely arise, and if they arise are dismissed as irrelevant.'

Again, Coomaraswamy asks : 'What is art or what was art ?' His study of Indian art rests on the answer he gives to this question. 'In the first place,' he writes, 'the property of the artist, a kind of knowledge and skill by which he knows, not what ought to be made, but how to embody the form in suitable material, so that the resulting artefact may be used. Art can then be defined as the embodiment in material of a pre-conceived form. The work of art is beautiful in terms of perfection, or truth and aptitude. Aristotle's dictum that the general end of art is good of man still holds good.'

Art, therefore, as conceived by Coomaraswamy, is not a superstition, but a way of life. This is his fundamental stand on the question and his views seem to be in complete agreement with the Aristotelian doctrine that the general end of art is man. Coomaraswamy, as we all know, was a unique fusion of art historian, philosopher, orientalist, linguist, and expositor. He had an almost unmatched understanding of all facets of traditional culture. His views on art are as stimulating as they are provocative. For instance, when he says that 'The **what** of art is far more important than the **how**', he actually means by it that the what that determines the how, as form determines the shape, is the fundamental thing. He goes on further to point out that 'a real art is one of symbolic and significant representation; a representation of things that cannot be seen except by

the intellect. In this sense art is the antithesis of what we mean by visual education.'

Coomaraswamy exhorts us to discard term **aesthetic** altogether. The Greek original of this modern word', he says, 'means nothing but sensation or reaction to external stimuli; the sensibility implied by the word **aisthesis** is present in plants, animals and man; it is what the biologist calls 'irritability'. These sensations are the driving forces of instinct. Aesthetic experience is of the skin you love to touch, or the fruit you love to taste.' Coomaraswamy therefore emphatically says: 'Disinterested aesthetic contemplation is a contradiction in terms and a pure non-sense. Art is an intellectual, not a physical virtue; beauty has to do with knowledge and goodness, of which it is precisely the attractive aspect; and since it is by its beauty that we are attracted to a work, its beauty is evidently a means to an end, and not itself the end of art; the purpose of art is always one of effective communication. It is not the aesthetic surfaces of works of art but the right reason of logic or the composition that will concern him. One should take into consideration the degree of the artist's success in giving clear expression to the theme of his work. In every discussion of works of art we must begin with their subject matter'.

But certain modern scholars on Indian art do not see eye to eye with Coomaraswamy's approach and we quote here one such view which we shall examine later on. One such scholar says: 'Cut off from his birth from the traditional roots and contemporary ways of life in India, nurtured and educated in an alien environment and atmosphere, and obliged to live away from India, Coomaraswamy's whole life seems to have been a nostalgic throw-back indeed to the land of his forefathers, a conscious and laborious attempt to affiliate himself to the roots of the people and the culture to which, he thought, he rightly belonged. He lived and died to re-discover the India of the past; but by reason of the very circumstance of

his life he was obliged to effect this re-discovery through the texts of a bygone age, texts both sacredotal and secular, but produced, in the main, within the confines of hieratic religious orders, and hence doctrinal and prescriptive in nature and idealistic in character. Coomaraswamy's India emerged from such texts, by and large...His basic assumption which he was inevitably and irresistably led to, was that Indian aesthetics was based on the doctrines, prescriptions and conventions of religions that were transcendental and intellectual in character and idealistic in aim and purpose. His interpretation and explanation of terms and concepts of aesthetic import were, therefore, conditioned to a large extent by the doctrines, prescriptions and conventions of these intellectual, idealistic and transcendental faiths. This basic assumption led him inevitably to an undue and not unoften irrelevant emphasis on the literary, religious, symbolical and metaphysical content of Indian art at the expense of considerations of important imaginative and aesthetic questions, problems of artistic form and its evolution and the human and social context of art. Indian art, it seems, was with him an illustrative material of Indian religions, their concepts and speculations, doctrines and conventions, symbols, and imageries...The Indian-ness of our art, he seems to have argued, lay in its literary, religious and symbolical content.'<sup>1</sup>

The critics of Coomaraswamy, however, should bear in mind the fact that if his study and understanding of Indian aesthetics and art were solely scripture-based, then Coomaraswamy could never have been so eminently successful in influencing their attitudes and approaches. Moreover, the fact that even in recent years most writers on Indian art have followed the tracks laid down by him and that Indian activities in the field of creative art have very largely been frankly literary and ideological, has been not a little due to Coomaraswamy who for the first time seems to have furnished the theory and the intellectual inspiration on which came to be based the

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1. An Approach to Indian Art : Nihar Ranjan Ray.

revival of our art activities during the first three decades of this century'.<sup>1</sup> Even today, we can assert without any fear of contradiction that Coomaraswamy remains the source to which one inevitably turns for an understanding of Indian art and aesthetics. Moreover, it should be pointed out here that in evaluating the expressive and artistic qualities of Indian art as a whole, he is ever vague.

Here we might say a few words on Havell who also opened our eyes to the lost glories of Indian art. Both E. B. Havell and Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy appeared on the Indian scene against the background of our cultural nationalism almost at the same time, to start the process of revaluation of our artistic heritage and of the resurrection of the traditional values of our art and for this they will be remembered for ever with gratitude. It should be borne in mind that it was against a degenerate aesthetic perception of our traditional values as of the spirit of our life and culture that Havell and Coomaraswamy raised the voice of protest which went a long way in redressing the balance, and ofcourse in bringing us to our senses in regard to our own cultural heritage.

It was Ruskin who first made an adverse criticism of Indian art as far back as 1858. In his lecture entitled 'The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art', at the South Kensington Museum in that year, he observed *inter alia* : 'It is quite true that the art of India is delicate and refined. But it has one curious character distinguishing it from all other art of equal merit in design—it never presents a natural fact. It either forms its compositions out of meaningless fragments of colour and flowings of line ; or if it represents any living creature, it represents that creature under some distorted and monstrous form. To all the facts and forms of nature, it wilfully and resolutely opposes itself ; it will not draw a man, but an eight-armed monster ; it will not draw a flower, but only a spiral or zigzag.'

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1. An Approach to Indian Art : Nihar Ranjan Ray











It is possible that the views of Birdwood, Archer, Vincent Smith and others have had their roots in Ruskin's criticism.

Vincent Smith wrote : 'After 300 A. D., Indian sculpture properly so called hardly deserves to be reckoned as art. The figures, both of men and animals become stiff and formal, perception of the facts of nature almost disappears and the idea of powers is clumsily expressed by the multiplication of members. The many-headed, many-armed gods and goddesses whose images crowd the walls and roofs of mediaeval temples have no pretensions to beauty, and are frequently hideous and grotesque'.

It required the genius of a Havell or a Coomaraswamy to indicate the abused India in the spheres of her art and culture. 'Havell was an artist and a knowledgeable person of sensibility and keen aesthetic perception. When he came out to India to direct art-teaching, first at Madras and then at Calcutta, he had already acquired a good background knowledge of Indian culture and civilization. . . on arrival in India he spent some time in educating himself in the religious traditions as well as in the abstract speculative thought of the country. Simultaneously, he studied as much and collected as many significant specimens of Indian art as possible to replace the appalling and degenerate plaster copies of Graeco-Roman nudes, English academy style statuary and indifferent prints of assorted forms and styles of European painting that used to crowd the galleries of our contemporary schools of art.'<sup>1</sup>

The supreme achievement of the Indian artists through the ages, Havell thought, was reached in the paintings of Ajanta, in the sculptures of Sarnath and Ellora, in the Chola Bronzes and at a somewhat lower level, Mughal and Rajasthani paintings. Dr. Ray has rightly observed that 'Havell had the drive and energy of a protagonist, and his one aim in life in India was to make his own people in England and Europe as much as contemporary

1. An Approach to Indian Art : Nihar Ranjan Ray.

Indian intellectuals, conscious of the excellence of Indian art as he saw and understood it.'

It can be said without fear of contradiction that this English art-critic constituted an essential factor in modern India's cultural awakening. As in his earlier writings Coomaraswamy recovered the deeper significance of India's national idealism, so was Havell very much a product of that phase of nationalism. He not only changed the direction of Indian art criticism, but also inspired the artistic renaissance of Bengal school. When Havell died in 1934, Rabindranath Tagore observed that 'no elaborate monument is required to perpetuate his name, for the work of Abanindranath Tagore and his school will be a living tribute to the memory of this great Englishman.'

Havell's approach to study of Indian art was more impassioned than accurate, depending rather upon imagination than scholarship. However there are several gaps in his analysis. He could hardly realise, as Coomaraswamy did, that Indian art history is a confluence of several cultures and civilizations. But one should not underestimate Havell's contribution towards the cultural reawakening of India at a time when it was so badly needed. For he had to reckon with a generation to whom Indian art conveyed no meaning. And apart from exhorting the Indian students to shed their superficial Western veneer and imbibe the spirit of their own culture, Havell had to defend the ideals on which Indian art was based to answer the criticisms of many Western intellectuals, beginning with Ruskin. Naturally the efforts of Havell and Coomaraswamy were primarily directed to channel India's national life towards a fuller understanding of its freedom and a deeper awareness of its cultural inheritance and dignity. And their work resulted in a new attitude towards Indian art.

It is interesting to note that when Coomaraswamy brought out his excellent publication **The Aim of Indian Art** (1908), he almost created a revolution in thinking by his masterly reputa-

tion of the theory of the Greek influence on Indian Art<sup>1</sup>, at the Congress of Orientalists, Copenhagen, in the same year. In this study and also in others, he tried to reconstruct and interpret the philosophy of national art rather than to convey merely the beauties of different art disciplines. He was not a romantic aesthetician but the foremost academic historian of Indian art. And he succeeded not only in synthesizing the ideals and traditions of Indian art scattered through the ages in different parts of Asia, but also in creating a new consciousness of Indian cultural unity. Our negligence and extreme apathy or indifference to our own art heritage so much pained him that on many occasions he said : 'Perhaps the most lamentable thing at the present time, is the fact that it is much easier to find an European audience capable of admiring fine examples of Indian art, than to find such an audience in India.

Finally, it would be no exaggeration to state that Coomaraswamy recovered our passport -- in the cultural sense of the term -- during the beginning of this century'. His role is similar to that of Emerson in America. Just as Emerson gave America her passport, so did Coomaraswamy recover the Indian passport. An idea of his voyage through India can be perceived in his early writings which have the freshness of a spring. Commenting on those rootless Indians Coomaraswamy drew a vivid portrait of the typical Indian in this category who disfigures the walls of his home with cheap oleographs, pretends to enjoy shrill records of European music, and then tries to save his soul by purchasing a share or two in a swadeshi soap company.' Again, in one of his essays in 'Art and Swadeshi' he yearns for the lost phases of our culture : 'Where are the filmy muslins or the flower woven silks with which we used to worship the beauty of Indian women, the brazen vessels from which we ate and drank, the carpets on which we trod with bare feet, or the pictures that revealed to us the love of Radha and the soul

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1. Truly Speaking, it was Swami Vivekanand who first reputed this prevalent view of the Greek influence on our art.

of the eternal snows ? It must also be stressed at this stage that the Indianness of Coomaraswamy was composed of several strands ranging from Buddhism to Islamic culture. In his totality of vision he could perceive more than anybody else of his time that 'in India, the religious, philosophical, and artistic consciousness is unified in a way incomprehensible to the Western mind; and however great the effort, it is necessary to realise this before Indian, or any Oriental art can be really studied or fairly judged.' He returned to this theme again and again with uncompromising directions.

In the last analysis, despite a few contradiction, much of his writing on Indian art and culture is idealistic. Coomaraswamy was first and foremost an artist, pure and simple and an aesthetic saint. When India achieved Independence his message was : 'Be yourself.' It placed the accent on aesthetic authenticity and not on political fads. 'Nations', wrote he, 'are created by artists and poets not by merchants and politicians. In art lies the deepest life principles'. And Coomaraswamy's greatness lies in the fact that he focussed the true vision of Indian art at the deepest level of its perception. It is, however, sad to reflect that at the time of his death, Coomaraswamy left a pile of eighteen unfinished manuscripts upon which he was working.

*CHAPTER EIGHT*  
**EVOLUTION OF INDIAN ART**

Coomaraswamy has thoroughly traced the history of the evolution of Indian art in his masterpiece **Introduction to Indian Art**. This work has been characterised by distinguished art critics of both the hemispheres as an ocean condensed into a luminous pearl. A basic work, it traverses the historic panorama of Indian art, from its Indo-Sumerian and Vedic Mound beginnings to the various peaks reached during the Maurya, Sunga, Andhra, Kusana and Gupta Period and beyond the seas to further India and Indonesia. It is a handbook of immense value to all lovers of Indian art tradition. The book was first published in 1913.

In his introduction to this book, Coomaraswamy writes : 'Art in India and art in the modern world mean two very different things. In India, it is the statement of a racial experience, and serves the purpose of life, like daily bread. Indian art has always been produced in response to a demand : That kind of idealism which would glorify the artist who pursues a personal ideal of beauty and strives to express himself, and suffers or perishes for lack of patronage, would appear to Indian thought for more ridiculous or pitiable than heroic. The modern world, with its glorification of personality, produces works of genius and works of mediocrity following the peculiarities of individual artist; in India, the virtue or defect of any work is the virtue or defect of the race in that age. The names and peculiarities of individual artists, even if we could recover them, would not enlighten us : nothing depends upon genius or requires the knowledge of an individual psychology for its interpretation.



To understand at all, we must understand experiences common to all men of the time and place in which a given work was produced. All Indian art has been produced by professional craftsmen following traditions handed down in pupillary succession. Originality and novelty are never intention. Changes in form, distinguishing the art of one age from that of another, reflect the necessities of current theology and not the invention of genius : changes in quality reflect the varying, but not deliberately varied, changes in racial psychology, vitality and taste. What is new arises constantly in Indian tradition, without purpose or calculation on the part of the craftsman, simply because life has remained over long extended periods on immediate experience. Tradition is a living thing, and utterly unlike the copying of the styles which has replaced tradition in modern life.

‘In India the same qualities pervade all works of any given period, from pottery to architecture, and all are equally expressive : the smallest fragment of a textile portrays the same as the most elaborate temple. In other words, there are no distractions of fine and applied or decorative art and no unsurmountable barrier dividing the arts of the folk from the canonical arts. An ‘art for art’s sake’, a fine or useless art, if it could have been imagined, would only have been regarded as a monstrous product of human vanity. The modern ‘fine’ or useless arts are unrelated to life and speak in riddles, and hence the utter impossibility of inculcating a ‘love of art’ in the people at large. A race producing great art, however, does so, not by its ‘love of art’, but by its love of life. In India, where no one discussed art ( there is no Sanskrit equivalent for the modern concept of ‘art’ ), where none but philosophers discussed the theory of beauty, and where sculptures and paintings we regard not as ‘works of art’, but as means to definite ends — there, art was an integral quality inhering in all activities, entertained by all in their daily environment, and produced by all in proportion to the vitality ( not the kind ) of their activity’.

Coomaraswamy believed more than anybody else that the greatness of Indian art is the greatness of all Indian thought and achievement. It lies in the recognition of the persistent within the transient, of the domination of matter by spirit. In the last chapter ( 'Understanding Indian Art' ) of the book, Coomaraswamy makes a brilliant exposition which only he is capable of doing. This chapter provides us with the key to open the door and then enter into the inside chamber of the Indian art as it evolved through the ages, thus enabling us to understand it in its proper perspective. We quote a few lines from this chapter :

'European influence on Indian art has been almost purely destructive : in the first place, by undermining the bases of patronage removing by default the traditional responsibilities of wealth to learning. Secondly, the impact of industrialism, similarly undermining the status of the responsible craftsman, has left the consumer at the mercy of the profiteer and no better off than he is in Europe. Thirdly, by the introduction of new styles and fashions, imposed by the prestige of power, which the Indian people have not been in a position to resist. A reaction against these influences is taking place at the present day, but can never replace what has been lost ; India has been profoundly impoverished, intellectually as well as economically, within the last hundred years.

'Even in India, an understanding of the art of India has to be rewon; and for this, just as in Europe where the modern man is as far from understanding the art of the Middle ages, as he is from that of the East, a veritable intellectual rectification is required. What is needed in either case is to place oneself in the position of the artist by whom the unfamiliar work was actually made and in the position of the patron for whom the work was made; to think their thoughts and to see with their eyes. For so long the work of art appears to us in any way exotic, bizarre, quaint or arbitrary, we cannot pretend to have understood it. It is not to enlarge our collection of bric-a-brac

that we ought to study ancient or foreign arts, but to enlarge our own consciousness of being.'

In Coomaraswamy we have a remarkable example of what Indo-Anglican culture can, at its noblest, produce. A man of oriental birth but with an European orientation, he brought to bear upon the heritage of the east an orderly and balanced mind that had been trained by the scientific processes of the west. Roman Rolland recognised this, and thought Coomaraswamy, like Tagore with whom during his Indian peregrinations he became friendly, was working to blend two cultures for the good of humanity. Let it be clear that this child of Ceylon loved India so dearly that he regarded it as his second land of birth as was the case with Sister Nivedita and C. F. Andrews. Coomaraswamy's syncretism was no starry eyed visionary's expression of a mere hope. His ten years of travel in India and thirty years of work in the USA brought him closer to the mind of the East and eventually made him the greatest art-historian India has ever known. It is to him and to him alone that we owe our knowledge of the evolution of Indian art as well as our **true** understanding of the spirit of the same.

His writings cover wide areas. They deal with religion, culture, history, art and philosophy. In his fifty odd volumes there is a unified theme, and it is a return to the integral life advocated and practised in ancient India. The man who spent his whole life in rehabilitating Indian art is certainly most competent and well-informed than anybody else to speak on the gradual evaluation of our art heritage, especially in the spheres of painting and sculpture.

As we have said earlier, Coomaraswamy's ideas about the nature and function of art are scattered in many of his works. Some of his profound insights appear in his historical surveys. Special mention must be made of his **Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon, Introduction to Indian Art, The Trans-**

**formation of Nature in Art, Indian and Indonesian Art, Asiatic Art, Vishwakarma, Yakshas, Origin of the Buddha Image, Elements of Buddhist Symbolism, and Mediaeval Sinhalese Art.** In these works and in several of his published papers we have an account of the evolution of Indian art with particular reference to its nature, function, and value. What distinguishes these works from similar ones by others is to be found in the scholastic equipment, a refined sensitivity, a profound sense of tradition, a critical and analytic attitude, and a persuasive language. The method followed is an integral one ; for he does not approach the works of art as though they were mere museum pieces. He relates the work to the culture of the times, to the traditional ideals of the artist, and to the underlying metaphysical foundations. Thus his study of Indian art becomes a study of the culture, thought and life of an entire race. Now let us look at Indian painting and sculpture through the discerning eyes of Ananda Coomaraswamy who had an almost unmatched grasp on the subject with considerable expository skill.

### **Painting :**

According to Coomaraswamy, Indian painting grew up in the service of religion and the court; it is a public art didactic and historical in which human figure plays the largest part and the landscape is only accidental. If the climate of India is particularly unfavourable to the preservation of paintings on paper, textiles or the walls of buildings, it possesses a series of cave temples which have permitted the survival of considerable cycles of paintings from about A. D. 100 onwards. The earliest and most famous are those in the Buddhist cave temples at Ajanta ( near Bombay) in the north of the state of Maharashtra. All the 29 caves were once decorated with paintings as well as sculpture but more than half have vanished, while even the six best preserved have suffered greatly from the damp, and injudicious attempts at preservation.

The Ajanta paintings are, Coomaraswamy emphatically says, thoroughly Indian and bear witness to the existence of a fully developed school of professional painters equal to the argeest undertaking. References in early literature indicate that the walls of palaces were covered with paintings as early as the 3rd century B. C. Apart from Ajanta the only surviving paintings of the classic school in India are in other cave temples at Bagh and Badami. Bagh is near Indore and the paintings there are three surviving fragments from a fine series which must have been painted in the 6th or perhaps the 7th century A.D. in full Gupta style. Coomaraswamy when he was in India, saw copies of two of these remaining compositions in the British Museum while the whole has been published by the India Society. At Badami, near Goa, there are wall paintings in cave 4, which, according to Coomaraswamy, was dedicated in A. D. 578, representing court and dance scenes. These are in early western Chalukyan style.

Of earlier date ( late 5th century A. D. ) are some wall paintings of Apsaras ( heavenly maidens ) on the walls of the ruined rock-cut castle of Sigiriya in Ceylon, which reflect the otherwise lost art of the Andhra dynasty in southern India. Already mediaeval in style are the wall paintings at Ellora, NE. of Bombay, not very far south-west of Ajanta, of which two layers are partially preserved, the earlier of the 8th century, the later of the early 10th : The style of these is more calligraphic and less sculptural and the second layer is more static than the first. Remains of wall paintings have been found in a remote area of western Tibet, near the Indian and Kashmir frontiers, in a Buddhist monastery at Man-nan, by the Italian scholar, Tucci. These paintings, Coomaraswamy observes, of about the year 1000, must have been executed by the mission from India led by a certain Buddhist reformer belonging to this area of Tibet. They seem to show some influence from the Pala style of painting of east-India, otherwise only known to us in the palm leaf Mss of Bengal and Nepal, which are the most important surviving examples of mediaeval Indian painting.

In southern India true frescoes were discovered by Coomaraswamy while he was moving from place to place in India as a pilgrim in search of India's cultural heritage, in Bradeswara temple in Thanjavur, dating from about A. D. 1000 and representing the middle Chola style, after which there is a gap until the painted ceilings as Sanapalayam and Lepakshi of the 16th and 17th centuries. But these appeared to the eyes of Coomaraswamy as crowded compositions with many figures arranged in a frieze-like way and this must illustrate the art of the last Hindu Kingdom that of Vijayanagar.

There is no denying the fact that with the Mughal empire, Indian painting began a new phase in its evolution. Ancient and mediaeval traditions gradually disappeared and gave way to modern characteristics. Indian art in its various aspects awoke from its centuries-long lethargy and began a glorious renaissance. Speaking about Mughal painting, Coomaraswamy says : All the evidence suggests that outside the Deccan the earlier Moham-medan conquerors hardly touched the course of painting in India; nothing in this field corresponds with their notable architecture. But perhaps as a part of their heritage from the house of Timur who had for generations patronised painters as well as poets, the Mughal rulers, from the first or at least from the second generation of Humayun, displayed marked interest in painting; and the best authenticated picture of Humayun shows him inspecting a miniature presented to him by Akbar. This was a signed work of a reputed Persian artist whom Humayun had taken into his service while living in exile at Kabul. Mughal painting might have continued a mere branch of Persian painting if Humayun and his successors had recruited their painting staff only from Persia.'

But he observes, it seems clear that the Mughal emperors were impressed from the beginning with the vitality and invention of Indian painting. Mughal painting, however, flourished once since the time when Akbar ascended the throne. Painting is extensively mentioned in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the valuable

contemporary account of the institutions of Akbar's reign by Abul Fazal, including brief account of leading painters. The later part of Akbar's reign, 1585-1605, saw great activity in his library and the full development of the Mughal style of manuscripts illuminated by a fusion of the Hindu and Persian elements. About this time Akbar welcomed three Christian missions of Jesuit fathers to his court. They introduced Christian paintings and engravings from Europe. One notable characteristic of the Mughal painting, according to Coomaraswamy, is manuscript illumination which flourished during the reign of Jahangir. It stopped during the reign of Shah Jahan, while portraiture continued to be a main product of the Mughal school of painting in India.

Coomaraswamy praises Mughal painting for its grace, lyricism and profound interest in individual character. In his view 'Mughal art reflects the actual world as well as the tact... The mind of the age – synthetic, not merely eclectic – finds its truest expression in the character of a man like Akbar ... a cultivated mind nourished alike by streams of Persian and Indian thought'.<sup>1</sup> Again, elsewhere he writes : 'Probably the most noteworthy technical qualities of Mughal painting are its restraint, rhythm, and mastery of composition. The command of outline shown in some of the drawings is astonishing; a feature to be connected with the great contemporaneous development of calligraphy. In portraiture the essential qualities are a certain architectural dignity, and the successful presentation of character. In domestic subjects, which sometimes include love-scenes of the most intimate character, we perceive a most charming tenderness and purity. Most surprising of all perhaps, is the intensely keen and loving observation evident in drawings of animals and flowers. One further point must be noted, that is the unrivalled decorative sense and refinement of the mounting. The decline of the artistic traditions coincided with the break up of the Mughal empire.'<sup>2</sup>

1. An Introduction to Indian Art : Coomaraswamy

2. 'Mediaeval Indian Painting,' Coomaraswamy, *Modern Review*, April 1910

Now about Rajput painting which was Coomaraswamy's startling discovery as an art-historian and which earned him wide appreciation. The collection of Rajput paintings includes the greater part of the Coomaraswamy, now Ross-Coomaraswamy collection, given to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston by Dr. Denman W. Ross in 1917. Amongst these are a majority of the important and standard examples illustrated in his **Rajput Painting**,<sup>1</sup> which came out in 1916. His theory that the Rajput style was different from the Mughal style, and really continued the native tradition, has since been conclusively proved by scholars engaged in the study of this branch of Indian painting.

Writing on Ananda Coomaraswamy as a historian of Rajput painting, B. N. Goswamy observes : 'When he wrote his **Rajput painting**, following a brief essay on the same theme in 1912, Coomaraswamy took the western world by storm as it were ... He was the true discoverer of Rajput art and it was he who gave a new meaning to Rajput painting. If several Rajput paintings had been known and even published before, they had never been collectively viewed or properly understood. They lay in a heap of material that went by the name of mediaeval Indian painting and it belonged to Dr. Coomaraswamy to pick them up, dust them and then insert them into the frame of his sensitive phrases. He proceeded then to distil for us the essence of Rajput painting, and in doing this brought to his task that brilliance of thought and that grace and facility of expression which he so powerfully commanded.'

'The themes of Rajput painting', observes Coomaraswamy 'are religious, lyrical and rhetoric and, less typically, secular. A favorite theme of Rajasthan painters is a set of illustrations to a **Rāgamālā** or 'Garland of Rāgas', poems describing the thirty-six musical modes. **Rāgamālā** paintings represent situa-

1. The complete title of the book which is in 2 vols. ran : 'Rajput Painting, being an account of the Hindu Paintings of Rajasthan and the Panjab Himalayas, from the 16th to the 19th century described in their relation to contemporary thought, with texts and translation'.



tions in human experience having the same emotional content as that which forms the burden of the mode illustrated. In other words, the burden of the music, the flavour of the poem, and the theme of the picture are identical. In as much as emotional situations have been elaborately subdivided and classified by the Hindu rhetoricians, in connection with literary and dramatic analysis, it follows naturally that the pictorial and poetical themes of the **Rāgamālās** often coincide with those of the rhetorical classification; thus, **Madhu Mādhavi Rāgini** is an **abhisārikā**. Further, inasmuch as the **Krisna Lila** is mainly concerned with the love relations of Radha and Krishna, these characters are frequently made use of in illustrating the **Rāgamālā** themes. Other pertinent situations are taken from Paurānik mythology or epic legend.'

In ultimate analysis, Rajput painting reflects the single-minded devotion of the artists. Attention is paid to every object included in it, and this makes us experience the intensity of primitive art. Its content is life in its universal aspect. It is classic. This must have been the only main reason why Coomaraswamy so sharply distinguishes between Mughal and Rajput painting, and attaches so much of importance to the latter as a product of the soil, an art of the people, as contrasted with the superficial, court-inspired art of the Mughals: in his scheme of things Mughal painting does not form a part of the pattern. It was 'but an episode in the long history of Indian painting which remained unaffected by it. Mughal painting did not embrace life and religion together and remained therefore on the fringe. 'This Hindu or Rajput art' wrote Coomaraswamy as early as 1910 to Sir William Rothenstein, 'is the descendant of Ajanta, and its rise and zenith and decline seem to cover at least 1,500 years. The 200 years of secular Mughal art is but a breath beside it.'

Whether Rajput painting belonged to the people in the sense in which Coomaraswamy understood it is arguable and critics have differed with his views on the subject. But there

can hardly be any difference in opinion that 'Rajput painting itself is an art of outline, and it shows that drawing and painting can be the same thing.

Thus when we look at the last chapter of his **Rajput Painting**, we find that Coomaraswamy renouncing his role as a historian of art, 'enters upon a marvellously eloquent plea for the revival in India of that unity of life and religion of which is born the flower of art, making at the same time an assertion of the faith that India may suffer but will find her voice again. To him Rajput art, a mystic, lyrical, continuing phenomenon that he had demonstrated as belonging to the people as a whole.'

Even the beauty of Indian miniature paintings drew comments from Coomaraswamy which are worth reproducing here. He says: 'The full flowering of miniature art began when India came into direct and violent contact with the civilisation of Islam. . . it reached its highest peak of splendour during the Mughal empire between the 16th and 18th centuries. Indian miniature painting, subjected to a strong initial Persian influence, was Indian both in form, content and execution. The vogue for miniature painting spread from the capital cities into the minor centres and into the provinces, where it always kept its predominantly worldly, and of course secular, character intact . . . Indeed we get a glimpse of Indian life in almost all the Mughal miniature paintings which later on gave rise to various schools having a distinct local style. These miniatures impress us by the originality of their subject matter, their bright colours, and refined treatment of detail. They touch upon the most varied aspects of surrounding life'. The miniature art, according to Coomaraswamy, underwent a long preparatory period which was predominantly Buddhist, and the most ancient miniatures belonging to this period bear technical and stylistic excellence.

### **Sculpture :**

Indian art is almost always and everywhere religious although secular art existed. Creation as well as contemplation

of an image are devotional acts. Sculpture, as an integral part of architecture, gives expression to spiritual forces\* through visible symbolical form often literary and narrative in content, Indian sculptures in an atmosphere of rich and fertile imagination which allowed great freedom of artistic expression inspite of the, sometimes, rigid iconography. Conceptual in approach and with limited phas s of naturalistic learnings, Indian sculpture is not concerned with appearances but with meaning. In this it resembles the art of other Asiatic countries and of mediaeval Europe. In the treatment of human and animal forms it developed an idealised anatomy determined by inherent rhythms, vitality and plastic power hardly ever matched in world art. The swelling surfaces of Indian sculpture seem to contain the very sap of life like the tightly drawn skin of a ripe fruit.

Coomaraswamy has always insisted on us that to appreciate our own artistic past at its right value we have to free ourselves from all subjection to a foreign outlook and see our sculpture and painting in the light of its own profound intention and greatness of the spirit. When we so look at it, we shall be able to see that the sculpture of ancient and mediaeval Indian claims its place on the very highest levels of artistic achievement. Havell was not far from truth when he wrote that it is difficult to find anywhere in the world excepting in India a sculptural art of a more profound intention, a greater spirit and a more consistent skill of achievement. Coomaraswamy who maintained the same view, always claimed for it a first place on account of the creative spirit inherent in it.

We give here a short extract from the notes on Indian art contributed to **Encyclopaedia Brittanica** by Ananda Coomaraswamy. Speaking about Indian sculpture he writes :

‘Among the earliest examples of sculpture belonging to the period of the Indus-Valley civilization, two figures, one of a nude male from Harappa, the other a dancer, perhaps, Shiva, from Mohen-jo-Daro, belong to a definitely Indian style of

expression with their emphasis on fullness and softness of the body suggested abstractly through the interlocking of the smooth convex planes of the surface.

‘Late Vedic literature, in which a large non-Aryan element had been absorbed, affords evidence for the making of images of popular deities in impermanent materials; and it is certain that the earliest known stone-figures (after the Indus Valley types, viz., the Yakshas of the Maurya and Sunga periods, despite their retention of primitive qualities are not first efforts in any sense; they represent an already advanced stage in stylistic and technical development. There is also the evidence of pre-Maurya terracottas representing the nude goddess and some other types. The latter are of very great importance for the history of art, for though they belong to a stylistic cycle older than that of the stone sculpture, and are still too little known, they provide connecting links in style, technique and costume between the oldest Indo-Sumerian art and that of the historical period. In their sense of the inseparability of beauty and fruitfulness, and in details of ornament, as well as in some facial types, they are related to the earliest sculpture in stone.

‘With the Maurya period, and especially the reign of Asoka from about 274 to 232 B. C., sculptural and architectural monuments in stone are found for the first time. These fall more or less definitely into two groups : (1) the court art of Asoka; and ( 2 ) the popular and perhaps more purely native art. The early Indian stone sculpture in the round of Maurya and Sunga date is represented by a number of colossal figures in royal costume, apparently statues of independent or attendant Yakshas and Yakshis, two of these having been found in a place near Baroda; also one at Deoria near Allahabad, one in Mathura and three at Patna; all are in sandstone and some are polished. The figures are distinguished by great mass and value. There is no conscious effort toward grace, but a statement of an ideal concept in a technique that is still primitive; for the form is fron-

tally conceived and the transitions from one plane to another are somewhat abrupt. The style achieved its perfection several centuries later in a Buddha figure set up at Sarnath. From this time onward the history of Indian sculpture is richly documented. The great stupa of Bharhut ( 175-150 B. C. ) of which the extant remains are now in Calcutta Museum, had an elaborately decorated railing ( **Vedika** ) and gateways ( **Toranas** ).

At Elephanta the most famous and perfectly preserved sculpture is a colossal relief in the main excavation, a three-headed bust which has often, though incorrectly, been called a Trimurti. It is actually an icon of Shiva in the form known as Maheswara... Sculpture in Orissa is typically Brahmanical, and occurs in connection with the series of great temples at Bhuvaneswara, Konarak, Puri etc., ranging in date from the 8th to 13th century. The monumental horses and elephants and the erotic architectural sculptures of the Sun temple at Konarak are especially noteworthy.

‘The magnificent temples of Khajuraho are literally covered with Brahmanical sculpture in a hard creamy sandstone, and isolated fine examples have been found at Mahoba, a Chandel capital. Jain sculptures too occur in abundance, but Buddhist works are relatively rare. To enumerate the sculptures of Rajputana would be impossible; there is much of quality.

‘An enormous revival of sculpture took place in the Deccan under the later Chalukyas after 973, under the Hoysalas of Mysore in the 12th and 13th centuries and in Gujarat under the related Solanki dynasty ( 10th to 15th century ). The sculpture of the Deccan and Mysore is executed in a fine-grained dark chloritic schist, which is comparatively soft when first quarried, and lends itself to an unlimited elaboration of design more appropriate to mural works than stone. At Sravana Belgola in Mysore there is a remarkable monolithic image of Gommateswara ( son of the first of the 24 Jinas of the Jain mythology ), one of the largest free-standing sculpture in the world, 57ft in height. This was carved in A.D. 981.

‘Sculpture in India flourished during the early Hindu dynasties in 7th and 8th centuries. The best examples of Pallava art are the sculpture at Mamallapuram which are Paurāṇik and of very high order.’

According to eminent art-historians, the artistic traditions of the Asokan period might be ultimately traced to those of the Indus valley. But the processes of evolution are hidden from us. It is generally held that the art-traditions of the Indus valley were gradually lost and that Mauryan art has an independent history. Though the Indian artists first began to work in stone during the Maurya period, a full-fledged Indian art was developed only under the Imperial Guptas. The five hundred years that intervened between the fall of the Mauryas and the rise of the Gupta empire constitute a distinct period in the evolution of Indian art. So far we can judge from extant remains, several important schools of sculpture flourished in different localities during this period — at Bharhut, Bodh-Gaya, Sanchi, Mathura, Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda. It was Coomaraswamy who first made a systematic study of them. According to him the sculptors of Sanchi are throughout inspired by a far higher sense of beauty, rhythm, and symmetry, and possess the difficult art of telling a complicated story in a simple lucid way. ‘As at Bharhut,’ writes Coomaraswamy, ‘we find before us a wonderful panorama of scenes of daily life and concrete examples of faith, hope, and ideals, though as a rule these are more complex and varied in character, showing a more intelligent appreciation of the facts and views of life.’

But the classical period of Indian sculpture began with the Gupta period. ‘The most important contribution of Gupta art’, observes Coomaraswamy, ‘is the evolution of the perfect types of divinities, both Buddhist and Brahmanical.. They not only remained models of Indian art in all times to come, but they also served as such in the Indian colonies in the Far East.’ Even the art of painting reached its height of glory and splendour in this age. The fine fresco-paintings on the walls and ceilings

of the Ajanta caves have extorted the unstinted admiration of the whole world. And it is Coomaraswamy who opened our eyes to the greatness of Indian sculpture and brought to us the aesthetic mind of the people in a manner which still remains unsurpassed.

## *CHAPTER NINE*

### **COOMARASWAMY THE TRANSCREATOR OF THE NATARAJA IMAGE**

‘The race imagination saw in the form of Siva’s dance, what men of science now express in mathematical discussion of the ether; and what they saw they expressed in their own language of poetry and form and we of modern times, prove only the littleness of our imagination if we think that we are greater because we express in mathematical formulae. What others saw in form and colour or heard in music.’ Thus wrote Coomaraswamy interpreting the image of Nataraja which occupies a special position in Hindu iconography, and adored by Saivaites in India. This image, it may be mentioned here, also inspired the poetic imagination of Rabindranath who wrote :

‘Lord of the Dance, man among men is he  
Striving and meditating inwardly,  
To break his bonds he sets his own force free,  
Through pain he seeks to rouse the fear of God.

Through conquering dance his own self is down-trod.’  
Presently we shall see, much to our surprise, that the conception of both the Poet and the art-historian on the subject is almost identical.

Coomaraswamy’s essay on ‘Dance in India’<sup>1</sup> and his other writings reveal not only the wide range and depth of his subject, but also his deep involvement in the problem. In folklore and fairy tales are preserved some of the esoteric doctrines and symbols which were not of popular invention. It is universaley

1. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (14th Edition).



known that when an intellectual decadence overtakes higher circles, the doctrinal material is preserved in these. At the level of the peasants it appears as a body of superstition, but in reality it is, as Coomaraswamy holds, 'a body of custom and belief that stands over from a time when its meanings were understood'. It is in this light that he offers a brilliant exposition of the famous dance of Siva embodied in the figure of Nataraja. 'The dance of Siva', says he, 'suggests the manifestation of primal rhythmic energy'.

Coomaraswamy, it should be pointed out here, more or less interprets this figure with the aid of the Tamil texts. Some of the features in the figure belong to the conception of Siva generally, and not to the dance. As a Yogi, He has the drum and the braided locks. 'The dance represents His five activities : creation or evolution, preservation or support, destruction or involution, veiling and release.' The drum sets creation in motion. The hand of hope protects, the fire destroys, and the raised foot offers release. The fourth hand points to this foot, the refuge of the soul. He dances with four elements in **Chidambaram**, the space of consciousness, which is the human heart and the self. The burning ground is the human heart, where all illusions and deeds are burnt away. Destroying illusion, causality and evil, He showers grace and offers bliss. It is a spontaneous dance and it transcends space, time and personality.

Summing up the essential significance of this dance, Coomaraswamy observes : 'First, it is the image of the Rhythmic Play as the source of all movement within the cosmos is represented by the Arch; secondly, the purpose of His dance is to release the countless souls of men from the snare of illusion; third'y, the place of the dance, Chidambaram, the centre of the Universe, is within the Heart.' This great cosmic dance of Siva is embodied in a figure which is metaphysical, religious, intellectual, and artistic; and it explains or suggests some of Coomaraswamy's ideas regarding the nature of beauty. 'This figure,' he says, 'offers a synthesis of science, religion and art.' It is

precisely this kind of synthesis that he sought throughout his life and work. It is then not surprising to notice a student of geology turning into a Sanskritist, an art critic and theorist, a student of mysticism, and last but not the least, a profound thinker.

The genius of Ananda Coomaraswamy, it appears to me, reached its zenith in his study of the image of Nataraja which culminated in his essay **Dance of Siva**, a masterpiece of his writings, and this essay eventually earned him the reputation as the greatest interpreter of the Dance of Siva. His pen-pictures of the dance of Siva form a series of correlated images which fully illuminate the vast canvas of his mind and the vaster canvas of Indian art and philosophy. Indeed he 'weaves into his descriptions of Siva and his cosmic dance the religion and traditional to values of our faith with such perception and sensitivity that all the body of our disparate exploration fall into place magically illuminate with visionary beauty and graphic simplicity, the pattern of reality which we so vainly sought but never found before.'

Truly so, for due to his Hindu heritage and background, Coomaraswamy, a devout Saivaite, had drunk deep in Saivaite literature written in Tamil language, including some philosophical works which conveyed a brilliant exposition of Tamilian Saiva Siddhanta. Thus he rediscovered the spirit, the meaning of the Nataraja image in his transcriptions of the Dance of Siva. We all know that it was in the cradle of Saivism that he was born and his scholastic father, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, had written on 'Saiva Siddhanta'. And this is no wonder that the summit of achievement of Sir Mutu's great son should be his essay, **Dance of Siva** in which Coomaraswamy interpreted for the first time the aesthetic significance of the dancing Siva in the perspective of 'Saiva Siddhanta'. Indeed, he breathed life into the age-old image of Nataraja, revealing to us 'the mysterious depths, the depth of life itself.'<sup>1</sup>

1. The Saiva Siddhanta system is the most elaborate, influential and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all the religions of India. It is

This essay along with thirteen others came out in a book form in 1917, titled **The Dance of Siva** and since then it has remained a classic. In his foreward to the French edition of this book Romain Rolland writes : 'In a series of essays which are apparently detached but all of which spring from the same central thought and coverage into one design, the vast and tranquil metaphysic of India is unfolded, her conception of the Universe, social organisation, perfect in its day and still capable of adaptation to the demands of modern times.' What is more, the author of this book appeared to the French savant as 'one of those greatest Hindus who nourished, like Tagore, on the culture of Europe and Asia, and justifiably proud of the splendid civilization, have conceived the task of working for Eastern and Western thought for the good of humanity.'

Hindu mythologies refer to the dances performed by Siva on various occasions. According to a particular mythological version, Lord Visnu, after defeating the Asuras, Madhu and Kaitabha, was so much overjoyed and moved into a perfect dance, which captivated Sri Lakshmi, and she learned the art from her divine husband. Visnu thereupon taught the art to Brahma, who in turn taught it to Lord Siva. Siva showed such mastery and skill in the art that he has been called 'Natesa' or Nataraja'. The shrine at Chidambaram<sup>1</sup> is significant where Lord is presented as a Cosmic Dancer.

'The Dance of Siva in Chidambaram', writes Coomaraswamy, 'forms the motif of the South Indian copper images of Nataraja, the Lord of the dance.'

peculiarly the South-Indian, and Tamil religion-Saivaism is the old prehistoric religion of south India, essentially existing from pre-Aryan times, and holds away over the hearts of the Tamil people.

1. Chidambaram, the seat of the Saivaite cult, is 150 miles south of Madras. The place is sanctified by the world-famous temple of Nataraja, covering an area of thirty-two acres and standing on a plain between two rivers. No granite is visible within fifty miles of the temple, yet the shrine and its walls are built of magnificent blocks of dressed granite.

These images represent Siva dancing having four hands with braided and jewelled hair of which the lower locks are whirling in the dance. In his hair may be seen a wreathing cobra, a skull, and the mermaid figure of **Ganga** : upon it rests the crescent moon and it is crowned with a wreath of cassia leaves. The chief part of His dress consists of tightly fitting breeches, and he wears also a fluttering scarf. The **Damaru** or the drum is held in one right hand, while the other is uplifted in a posture signifying *abhaya*, meaning 'fear not' ; one left hand holds fire, the other points downward to the lifted foot. The right foot is pressed down upon the Asura—a dwarf holding a cobra : the left foot is raised. There is a lotus-pedestal, from which springs an encircling arch of glory—fringed with flame, and touched within by the hands holding drum and fire. The images are of all sizes, rarely if ever exceeding four feet in total heights'.<sup>1</sup>

Such then is the image of Nataraja which has come down to posterity. The hymns to Siva find in the soul of India as few others Saivaite hymns do. Even in recent times both Rabindranath and Sir Aurobindo have attempted in their poetry to express in words the inexpressible beauty of their vision of the dance of Siva. Some western scholars too have tried exegesis of the poetry inherent in the stone images of Nataraja. In the popular imagination of millions of ordinary Hindus the Nataraja occupies a place of honour not generally shown to other deities. To the more profound Hindus, the image of Nataraja is regarded as Siva in his dancing manifestation and He embodies in Himself and gives manifestation to Eternal Energy.

Coomaraswamy, it should be pointed out here, has explained in his 'The Transformation of Nature in Art' that the dance of Siva takes place not merely at Chidambaram, but in the heart of the worshipper. Perhaps we are all worshippers of Nataraja. For the dance of Siva is an aesthetic summing up of an Indian view of life that lights up the deeps of the creative process. Concluding the essay—'The Dance of Shiva'—Coomaraswamy

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1. The Dance of Siva : Coomaraswamy.

writes : 'So far I have refrained from all aesthetic criticism and have endeavoured only to translate the central thought of the conception of Shiva's dance from plastic to verbal expression, without reference to the beauty or imperfection of individual works. But it may not be out of place to call attention to the grandeur of this conception itself as a synthesis of science, religion and art. How amazing the range of thought and sympathy of those rishi-artists who first conceived such a type as this, affording an image of reality, a key to the complex tissue of life, a theory of nature, not merely satisfactory to a single clique or race, nor acceptable to the thinkers of one century only, but universal in its appeal to the philosopher, the lover, and the artist of all ages and all countries. How supremely great in power and grace this dancing image must appear to all those who have striven in plastic form to give expression to their intuition of Life.'

'Nature is inert, and cannot dance till Shiva wills it : He rises from his rapture, and dancing sends through inert matter pulsing waves of awakening sound, and 'lo ! matter also dances appearing as a glory round about Him. Dancing, He sustains its manifold phenomena. In the fulness of time, still dancing, He destroys all forms and names by fire and gives new rest This is poetry ; but nonetheless, science.'

Here Ananda Coomaraswamy appears to us more as a philosopher than an art historian. Presently we shall discuss briefly this aspect of his phenomenal life. But before we touch on this topic let us see how Coomaraswamy highlighted and interpreted the image of Nataraja to a hostile world. His very interpretation of the Dance of Siva transformed itself into a popular subject to art historians, thanks to the touch of alchemy from him. Gods with many limbs, abhorred as unnatural and reflecting a primitive society steeped in superstition, according to them, gained a sympathetic audience who lent their ears to symbolism contained in them. To those who wrote that 'After 300 A.D. Indian sculpture hardly deserves to be reckoned as art' and spoke of 'these hideous deities with

animal's heads and innumerable arms and considered 'that monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher form of artistic representation,' Coomaraswamy has this to say :

'A work of art is great in-so-far as it expresses its own theme in a form at once rhythmic and impassioned though a definite pattern it might express a motif deeply felt ... It is no criticism of a fairy tale to say that in our world we meet no fairies. It is no criticism of a heart-fable to say that after all animals do not talk English or Sanskrit. Nor is it a criticism of an Indian icon to point out that we know no human beings with no more than two arms. To appreciate any art, we ought not to concentrate our attention upon its peculiarities -- ethical or formal, but should endeavour to take for granted whatever the artist takes for granted. No motif appears bizarre to those who have been familiar with it for generations; and in the last analysis it must remain beyond the reach of all others so long as it remains in their eyes primarily bizarre.<sup>1</sup>

There is yet another aspect of Coomaraswamy's interpretation of the dancing Siva in the perspective of modern science. His 'celebrated essay,' writes A. Ranganathan, 'which appeared in the wake of Roentgen's discovery of X-rays, was actually Written before Lord Rutherford had bombarded the atom. And the conception of the dancing Siva, which is continuous and which is constructive and destructive, perpetual motion and stable equilibrium at one and the same time, makes one think of the interior arrangements of patterns in crystals and artificially bombarded atoms. And if the dance itself is viewed as a ceaseless flow of patterns, Coomaraswamy is certainly justified in observing that 'no artist of today, however great, could more easily or wisely create an image of the Energy which science must postulate behind all phenomena.'<sup>2</sup> And herein lies the significance of Coomaraswamy's creative interpretation on the subject. He will thus be ever remembered as one who brought out the essential meaning of the Dance of Siva.

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1, Dance of Siva : Indian Images with many Arms—Coomaraswamy.

2. Akasvani, Aug 22, 1926



## CHAPTER TEN

### COOMARASWAMY : THE PHILOSOPHER

After 1930 Coomaraswamy appears to have turned more and more to philosophy and mysticism and the world recognised the philosopher in him. Although some of his earlier works established his stature as an art historian, yet with the passage of years, he turned increasingly to philosophy. 'The Hindus have never believed in art for art's sake, their art like that of mediaeval Europe was art for loves sake.' This unambiguous remark in the preface to **The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon** fully reveal to us the philosopher in Coomaraswamy.

Again fully sharing the conviction of Okakura<sup>1</sup> that 'Asia is on', Coomaraswamy emphatically observes that 'it is only due to various accidents that the art of India which is to so great extent an art of sources has been so long neglected. Thus 'Ananda Coomaraswamy, the philosopher in embryo, introduced as an art historian was in his true splendour and form as the years rolled by.' In the present chapter it is our intention to discuss this particular aspect of his genius which has not been so far properly and fully taken into account by his critics. Coomaraswamy was as much an art-critic and art-historian as he was a philosopher. But he was never a traditional one. A glimpse into his philosophical outlook will at once reveal to us the less known fact of his life that he treated philosophy as a philosophy of life and it was never an academic exercise with him. Like Tagore, he never claimed to be an academic philosopher and this is

1. Count Kakuzo Okakura, the well-known Japanese art-historian came to India in the early years of the first decade of this century. Coomaraswamy met him at the House of Jorasanko where Okakura was an honoured guest of the Tagores.



clearly reflected in almost all his philosophical writings. A scientist as he was from the beginning of his career, with Coomaraswamy the world is real, not an illusion due to the perversity of man's cognition. It is as real as man himself.

**The following paragraph in the centennial Report of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston ( which was founded in the year 1870 ) gives us a correct picture of the philosopher in Ananda Coomaraswamy.**

'Few scholars in any field have thought more profoundly or written more prolifically than Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. He was physically and intellectually a unique ornament to the Museum of Fine Arts for three decades, although intermittently a methodical curator. A tall spare man with an ascetically bearded face surrounded by a leonine lock of hair, he had proceeded from mineralogy to art history before he arrived in Boston. As a mind like his never rests, he continued through aesthetics to metaphysics, and in his later years had become rather completely a philosopher and theologian who spoke the language of Yoga and of Thomas Aquinas with unconscious transition between East and West.'

His very attachment to the theme of Nataraja, we may conjecture, must have inspired Coomaraswamy to be drawn to philosophy and metaphysics more and more as he advanced in age and eventually these emerged the resplendant philosopher out of the hard shell of the art-historian. And it is this philosopher, and not the art-critic, who interpreted the cosmic dance of Siva, for long a closed book to many. The theme was so dear to this great savant and philosopher that he returned to it again and again in many of his latter day some have expressed the opinion that the theme of Nataraja became an obsession with him while others held the view that it was almost an intoxication on his part to think and write so much on it. But it was neither.

He himself has explained his conception of the image of Nataraja in the following words : 'The Lord Siva is really a

supernal dancer. This dancing on His part is not a mere incident but a cosmic epiphany and bound up with the whole doctrine of Siva's form as Nataraja...The Nataraja type is one of the great creations of Indian Art, a perfect visual image of Becoming adequate complement and contrast to the Buddha type of Being.<sup>1</sup> As the concept of Being and Becoming became manifest in his thought, Coomaraswamy drifted more and more to perennial philosophy and this side of his life ~~deserves~~ our special attention. Indeed he has been rightly described as 'a sage and seer while completely aware of the illusory character of of the world of objectivity.'

It is as an expositor of traditional views that Coomaraswamy will be remembered by the historian of modern Indian thought. He did not propound any new theories ; nor did he attempt to bring together different points of view in the hope of achieving an ideological synthesis. He was convinced of the adequacy and universality of the ancient world-view, of the **philosophia perennis** that has provided a spiritually satisfying basis for the life of hundreds of millions. His aim was to explain every facet and every manifestation of this world-view in art, craft, myth, poetry, ritual and philosophy. To achieve this he took his stand firmly upon original texts, confident that these, when expounded with comprehension, were enough to answer all doubts and remove all misunderstandings.

Coomaraswamy's philosophical point of view appear to be enshrined in a number of basic convictions. These may be summed up thus : first, that the basis of all civilization is essentially spiritual and that, while modern Europe has repudiated this basic, the Orient has always held fast to it ; secondly, that in the East, and particularly in India, all art, literature and philosophy are wholly religious, and hence mainly preoccupied with man's longing to 'reach the divine'; thirdly, that Indian art and poetry have, therefore, never been representational and must not be judged or interpreted on the basis of the modern criteria of

**1. An Ivory Casket from Southern India: Coomaraswamy.**

individual expression or veracity to material reality; fourthly, that the social and political organisation of oriental society has always been perfectly adapted to the fundamentally religious basis of life; and its customs, institutions and economic methods are therefore self-sufficient and harmonious; and lastly, that the way of life evolved by the west as the result of modern industrialism is unnatural, destructive of spiritual and aesthetic refinement, degrading, immoral and frustrating; and that the impact of this upon ancient Oriental societies has been wholly evil.

It will be generally admitted that these are extreme opinions and the force and persistence with which Coomaraswamy expressed them made him a controversial figure in the world of learning. He was not the man to tone down his views or make ideological concessions in the name of 'tolerance'. 'If carried to far', he writes, 'tolerance implies indifference, and becomes intolerable'. In applying his strong convictions to the study of various fields of culture, he made statements that are manifestly one-sided. Before we notice these, however, fairness demands that we should also be on our guard against some misunderstandings that have arisen about his so-called 'Orientalism'.

By the expressions 'Eastern traditions' or 'Oriental culture' Coomaraswamy does not refer to geographical division between East and West. He sees no opposition between the two areas of human culture in ancient and mediaeval times. 'If we leave out the modernistic, individualist philosophies of today', he asserts, 'and consider only the greatest traditions of magnanimous philosophers, it will be found that distinctions of East and West are comparable only to differences of dialect while the essential spiritual language remains the same.' Before the Renaissance there was no hiatus at all; it is only the West abandoned the common path and struck out for itself a dangerous, deceptively fascinating new road that differences have arisen. Plato and the Orphic mysteries, St. Augustine and Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boheme and Thomas Kempis represent the same spiritual impulse

that we find in the Upanishads, in Mahayana Buddhism, in Chandidas and Tagore.

What distinguished Ananda Coomaraswamy was his penetration beneath the fruits of art to their cultural roots and his recognition that these deeper sources are always profoundly and even technically philosophical in character. Here it would be interesting to note what Romain Rolland had in mind when, introducing Coomaraswamy's **Dance of Siva**, he wrote : ' I invite Europeans to taste the delight of this rhythmic philosophy, this deep slow breath thought. From it they would learn those virtues which, above all others, the soul of Europe needs today; tranquillity, patience, hope and unruffled joy -- like a lamp in a windless place that does not flicker.'

Because of his philosophical bent of mind, Coomaraswamy could enter into the spirit of Indian life and culture just as Sister Nivedita did. As pointed out earlier, the spiritual consciousness of India flowed in his blood stream, determining his aesthetic response as an art historian. He could sum up the religious as well as cultural importance of India in these beautiful lines : 'Go to Ajanta, Ellora or Mahabalipuram, or visit the ruins of Nalanda, Rajagriha or Konark, you can see the glorious past of India before your eyes and in the murmur of the waters of the Ganges at Banaras and Hårdwar, you can hear the voices of the ages gone by.' Thus in him the Indian consciousness was concerned exclusively with art, religion and culture. It is this sensitive yet perfectly historical perception of aesthetic values which inspired Coomaraswamy to harmonise tradition and modernity into a cultural and religious process of sustained achievement.

The last achievement of all thought is a recognition of the identity of spirit and matter, subject and object; and this reunion is the marriage of Heaven and Hell, the reaching out of a contracted universe towards its freedom, in response to the love of Eternity for the productions of time. There is then no sacred or profane, spiritual or sensual, but everything that lives

is pure and void. This very world of birth and death is also the great Abyss.'

This happens to be the opening paragraph of the tenth chapter of Coomaraswamy's splendid work **The Dance of Siva**. This chapter which is titled 'Sahaja' is significant far in so as it gives us a clue to his deep conviction in the Hindu faith, especially his intense love for Vaishnavism—particularly of the Bengal School founded by Sri Chaitanya. It is not known to many that when Coomaraswamy visited Calcutta for the second time, in 1911, he was very keen to have a formal spiritual initiation from a Bengali Brahmin, but in the end he was initiated into Vaishnavism from a great Vaishnava Saint<sup>1</sup> whom he might have met in Puri during his four days sojourn in Orissa<sup>2</sup> in that year.

Since then Coomaraswamy was so much drawn to this cult that he made a special study of the ideology of this particular branch of Hinduism. He found in mediaeval Vaishnavism deepest and subtlest spiritual experience leading to the creativity of Indian art during this period of our cultural history. When asked about his views as to the significance of Vaishnavism and its place in **Sanatan dharma** and Hindu society, he is said to have made this remark : 'When caste bigotry and prejudices asserted themselves and drove many of those subjected to them into the fold of Islam, then arose preachers of Hindu brotherhood like Ramananda and Chaitanya, Kabir, Nanak, Dadu and Namdev, to rekindle the dying embers of life and light in Hindu society ... To develop a degree of organic wholeness and a sense of common obligation, the Caste spirit must go. We have to get rid of the innumerable castes and outcastes, with their spirit of exclusiveness, jealousy, greed and fear. Places of worship should be open to all. And Vaishnavism shows the way to achieve

1. O. C. Ganguly, one of the intimate acquaintances of Coomaraswamy and also a well-known art historian and Indologist, once told me that it was from Charandas Babaji, a great Vaishnava saint that he took his formal initiation into Vaishnavism; this fact he all along kept a closed secret.

2. See Appendix I : 11

this.' It should be pointed out here that Coomaraswamy was very much inclined towards the Chaitanya cult of Vaishnavism which he regarded as the most perfect and appealing to the common people.

Coomaraswamy's life was characterised by deep conviction and intense faith in the Hindu Dharma. But, on this account, those who would stigmatize him as a 'reactionary' have had their critical faculty atrophied by the drugging effect of their own shallowness and self-deception. While his writings at every stage tempered with rationalism, he believed in what he wrote or said. This intense faith is not only apparent in his works, but also in his personal life and behaviour. Once while he was staying at Banaras, Coomaraswamy was approached by a group of young Brahmin scholars to explain to them about the characteristics of the Hindu **Dharma**. They put him certain questions on the merits of the Hindu faith and they were amazed at his depth of knowledge on the subject. 'What do you mean by religion or **dharma**?' Answering to this question Coomaraswamy replied : 'The principles which we have to observe in our daily life and social relations are constituted by what is called **dharma**. It is truth's embodiment in life, and power to refashion our nature.'

Indeed the transparency of his philosophical thinking have found adequate expression in some of his excellent religious writings. For instance, we quote the following from one of his well-known works : 'Under the concept of **dharma**, the Hindu brings the forms and activities which shape and sustain human life. We have diverse interests, various desires, conflicting needs, which grow and change in the growing. To round them off into a whole is the purpose of **dharma**. The principle of **dharma** rouses us to a recognition of spiritual realities not by abstention from the world, but by bringing to its life, its business and its pleasures, the controlling power of spiritual faith. Life is one, and in it there is no distinction of sacred and secular. The ordinary avocations of daily life are in a real sense service of the Supreme. The common tasks are as effective as monastic devo-

tion. A true Hindu does not elevate asceticism or exalt the sterile renunciation of the joys of life.'

Coomaraswamy's Hindu faith has been perfectly and appropriately expressed in this line : 'With me **Dharma** is word of protean significance; its basic principle is the realisation of the dignity of the human spirit, which is the dwelling place of the Supreme ' And this is confirmed by our scriptures that 'The knowledge that the Supreme Spirit dwells in the heart of every living creature is the abiding root principle of all dharma. Know this to be the essence of **dharmā** and then practise it.'<sup>1</sup> Those who have read Coomaraswamy's illuminating study on the Vedas<sup>2</sup> must have seen that his attitude to the Vedas was moulded by his thorough knowledge of this sacred scripture of the Hindus. His philosophical thinking was more or less fashioned by it. He regarded it as transcripts from life, revealing the spiritual experiences of souls strongly endowed with sense for reality 'The truths revealed in the Vedas', writes Coomaraswamy, 'are capable of being re-experienced on compliance with ascertain d conditions. We can discriminate between the genuine and the spurious in religious experience, not only by means of logic but also through life ... what is written in the Vedas are the echoes of God's voice in the souls of man long ago, our regard for them must be tempered by the recognition of the truth that God has never finished the revelation of His wisdom and love.'<sup>3</sup>

A critic writing on Coomaraswamy's attitude to Hinduism<sup>n</sup> observes : 'The interpretation of Hindu thought that Ananda Coomaraswamy gave to the world was that of an intelligent, and sensitive traditionalist, who identified himself with the tradition and unfolded its details from, so to speak, within. The interpretation was acute, analytical, but sympathetic, rendered by one whose outlook was identical with that of those who had fashioned the symbols and rituals of the faith and formulated

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1. Chhandogya Upanisad

2. A New Approach to the Vedas; Coomaraswamy

3. Ibid.

its doctrines. He was no reformer or zealot. He never apologized for Hinduism. He never wanted to convince his critics that it was not so bad as they thought it was. He never accepted the position that Hinduism had to justify itself in terms of norms set by other faiths. He was content to say what he thought Hinduism was, and to leave it at that.' This at once reminds us of Sister Nivedita who resembled Coomaraswamy in her endeavours in making Hinduism respectable in Western eyes.

If Indian art and philosophy are today better understood in other parts of the world, especially in Europe and America, than they were sixty-two years ago, the credit must largely go to two men — Tagore and Coomaraswamy. Both cultural ambassadors of the highest order. The creative genius of Rabindranath, his strivings for a synthesis of East and West drew so much admiration from Coomaraswamy that the latter was profoundly influenced by the poetry of Tagore and some of his philosophical ideas were shaped by them. It is not known to many that when Coomaraswamy for the first time read Tagore's well-known book of poems titled **Sishu**, he was simply surprised at its depth of meaning. 'This particular volume,' once he told to Ajit Kumar Chakravarty,<sup>1</sup> 'contains more philosophy than is found in our scriptures, so simple yet so profound. I regard him as one of the greatest philosophers of our time.' And this must have been the reason which had inspired him to translate the two most outstanding pieces<sup>2</sup> from this book which own him admiration from the poet himself. They were published in the **Modern Review** in 1911 — the noted English monthly in which appeared innumerable articles of Coomaraswamy. Incidentally it might be mentioned here that Coomaraswamy had encouraged the Poet to have his works translated into English.

Coomaraswamy's philosophical thinking are scattered in many of his works, particularly in **Hinduism and Buddhism**.

1. Ajit Kumar Chakravarty ( 1886-1932 ) was a professor of Visva Bharati and the first private secretary of the poet.

2. See Appendix I : 14.



Turning from art and aesthetics to philosophy and religion, his output was no less remarkable. Such works as **The Pertinence of Philosophy, Gradation, Evolution and Reincarnation, Religious Basis of Indian Society, and Nietzsche and the Gita** reveal his deep insight into pure philosophy and also his equally profound knowledge of comparative religion. In order to fully understand Coomaraswamy, the philosopher, it should be borne in our mind that throughout his many writings on Eastern and Western art, religion, culture, history, language, values and man, Coomaraswamy has always stressed the usefulness of the discipline in relation to man and man's needs. Philosophy is no exception to the general approach to the other civilizing disciplines known to man.

Let me illustrate this point on the usefulness of philosophy from Coomaraswamy's point of view by a statement he made in a paper, 'The Pertinence of Philosophy' (1936). It illustrates the direction that he thought philosophy ought to take, it makes an interesting point about the purpose and function of philosophy, and it implies certain natural benefits that must occur when philosophy, as Coomaraswamy understood it, is doing its job well : 'So that if we are to consider what may be the most urgent practical problem to be resolved by the philosopher, we can only answer that this is to be recognised in a control and revision of the principles of comparative religion, the true end of which science, judged by the best wisdom (and judgement is the proper function of applied wisdom), should be to demonstrate the common metaphysical basis of all religions.'

In fine, it was the thinker, the philosopher in this great art historian and scholar who said : 'All our artistic endeavour signify a deeper purpose and the purpose of art is effective communication.' And by this he meant : 'Let us tell the painful truth that all the works of art are about God, whom nowadays we never mention in polite society.'

This was Ananda Coomaraswamy, the philosopher, to whom art was the handmaid of religion, and this was his supreme

message. Let us hope that in these days of cultural decadence and devaluation, when we are groping in the dark to find our sense of values, Coomaraswamy's life and works will lead us from that darkness into light. Even in works on aesthetics, he sought for the universal truths found in Indian philosophy and religions, Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain and in Christian thought. He wrote of the universality of religion of 'one world type of thinking,' as one far ahead of his time. For, he said, 'The Truth is one and God is one, and He is surely the one summit to which all ways must lead, by however many different names.' As a true philosopher, Coomaraswamy firmly believed that 'The word of God is not bound by any of the languages in which it has been spoken.'

Thus he could present Indian religious with the perfect understanding of a native born scholar. Moreover, his whole life as it were was characterised by deep conviction and intense faith in Hinduism. Indeed, it was his heritage. In this connection we are at once reminded of what Coomaraswamy himself said on the occasion of his seventieth birthday : 'I have not remained untouched by the religious philosophies I have studied and to which I was led by way of the history of art. In my case, understanding has involved belief ; and for me the time has come to exchange the active for a more contemplative way of life.'

Again, it is the philosopher in Ananda Coomaraswamy who with a clear conception and a deep sense of conviction in Hindu faith, proclaimed to the world : All that India can offer to the world proceeds from her philosophy. And he always regarded Indian philosophy as 'the key to the map of life, by which are set forth the meaning of life and the means of attaining its goal.' It is also interesting to note that the philosopher in Coomaraswamy had planned to write during the closing years of his life a book on Reincarnation and, also to write a commentary on parts of the Upanisads.'

Finally, Coomaraswamy the confirmed philosopher during the evening glow of his life, wanted the whole world to learn

that 'the object of human life is not to waste it in a feverish anxiety and race after physical objects and comforts, but to use it in developing the mental, moral, and spiritual powers, latent in man.' Thus steeped in the oriental traditions, Ananda Coomaraswamy became such a superb, sensitive link between the East and the West. One could sum up his basic philosophy thus : Life, like art, must be lived in the right way --- 'the right way which embodied the right spirit -- all great traditions being right, all great traditions being equal one to the other.'

1. See Appendix I: 13 (c)

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### COOMARASWAMY AS SEEN OTBYHERS

[ During his lifetime, Ananda Coomaraswamy became almost a world celebrity as an Indologist, art-historian and also as a universal man: He had innumerable admirers and followers in both the continents of Europe and America. Whenever he was invited to deliver lectures at the Harvard University or in any other educational or cultural institutions, a large number of students would invariably be found to throng at his class-room. In this chapter we give some extracts from the writings of a number of eminent persons who knew Coomaraswamy or who had the privilege of coming in his contact sometimes or other. Readers will get an intimate picture of the mind and face of this great scholar and patriot out of the opinions expressed here. ]

#### 1

I had the privilege of knowing Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy since the time he was an honoured guest at our Jorasanko house. The memory of many an unforgettable evening in our London apartment also comes back to my mind. I vividly remember still this day the picturesque figure of this renowned art-critic. When I was in London in about 1909 or 1910, a performance was given of a play I had written which was in support of the Indian Nationalist cause. Dr. Coomaraswamy along with some of his distinguished English friends came to this performance. It was about this time that he translated into English some of my poems which fully captured the spirit of the original. I met him for the last time in 1934 when I was in America.

I have read with a good deal of interest some of his works which appear to me to contain most original thought, the range of which is beyond my comprehension. Whatever we call him we find something is left over, something of his work which is in the last analysis indefinable. He exceeds all our definitions—all our definitions fall very far short of his actual work. He is always something else. But above all, I regard Dr. Coomaraswamy as India's Cultural ambassador to the West.

—*Rabindranath Tagore*

2

If I can correctly recollect, it was in London that I met Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy for the first time. He was introduced to me by my friend Rabindranath who spoke highly of his aesthetic attainment. Dr. Coomaraswamy impressed me not only by his physical appearance which was really superb from top to toe, but also by his genuine love for India which he regarded as his motherland. A born scientist as he was, Dr. Coomaraswamy became an art-historian and art-critic and in this sphere he stands second to none. He recovered for us the lost glory of Indian painting and sculpture and interpreted thus superiority to the West in a convincing manner. And for this India should remain ever grateful to this son of Ceylon.

—*Jagadish Chandra Bose*

3

Remarkable and spectacular has been the life of Ananda Coomaraswamy who in many respects resembled Sister Nivedita. I met him first at our Jorasanko house; it must be sometimes during the epoch-making Swadeshi days. He shared with us a common inspiration in the revival of our cultural heritage. Here was a towering personality whose love for India and everything Indian knew no bounds. When I read his book *Art and Swa-*

**deshi**, I was, so to speak, highly impressed. While others have said much, what can I say about Coomaraswamy? I was first drawn to him by mutual interests in art and gradually I came to realise that here is a great mind which by its very nature could not be trammelled by the follies of feebler intellects. By his brilliant expositions of our cultural heritage, his incisive searchings into the many complexities of India's past artistic achievements—his presentment of Indian art and the singular manifestations of the Indian mind, Coomaraswamy raised high the tattered standard of Indian art. Indeed it was he and he alone who caused an awakening by stirring the old artistic traditions of India.

—*Abanindranath Tagore*

4

Not a man, but a phenomenon – that is how Ananda Coomaraswamy has crystallized in the consciousness of many a scholar. I do not know of any one who so much as approximated to Coomaraswamy in his amazing range of knowledge of languages, European and Asian, religions, philosophies, the sciences, arts and their criticism... . His was a museum without walls; for him one tradition led to another until the frontiers seem to blur. He could thus move back and forth between antiquity and modernity and circle round the globe with fabulous ease thus enacting the concept of the universal man. It is enough to glance through his references at the end of a chapter or essay in his works to be convinced of the truth of what I am at pains to point out. To say this is to appreciate the paradox that he is in the great tradition of the Upanishadic sages who, incidentally, achieved through **Sadhana** 'perfection of the life' through 'perfection of the work' – the two are not different to him as they seem to be to one like W. B. Yeats.

Coomaraswamy has convinced us in essay after essay that the Indian mind made no distinction between the sacred and the secular; between the fine arts and useful arts, because all

art has a necessity...The tragedy is that Indian critics did not consider it worthwhile to turn their attention to him for a possible source of nourishment.

—C. D. Narasimhaiah

5

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore brought with him Ananda Coomaraswamy D. Sc. sometime in 1909 to stay with us students at the Brahmavidya Ashram for about a week. Although I was young, I was already interested in art and I had a camera given by my father. I took some photographs of Dr. Coomaraswamy and Gurudev together but unfortunately these photographs have been stolen with some other art collections in 1942. Gurudev showed me several books on Indian Art by Dr. Coomaraswamy. He was indeed a fine collector and a great scholar on Indian Art. I remember vividly while taking the photographs, the spotless white turban on his head, he was a very handsome looking gentleman always in his white Kurtas. He was then staying in the first floor of Gurudeva's house in Santiniketan as he was a special guest. He prayed and meditated almost all the time. One evening Gurudeva and his cousin Dinendranath Tagore and about ten or twelve students organised a musical programme for him and someone started playing Gurudev's songs in organ—harmonium. He was shocked at this ugly harmonium and shouted saying, 'Stop, stop that harmonium.' It appears he disliked this instrument. Thereafter Dinendranath arranged for Indian string instruments like the **Sitar** and **Esraj** to be played as accompaniment to Gurudev's music and he was very happy then. He used to enjoy meals with Gurudev, and hardly went outside the ashram, but mostly went around the gardens of the ashram. He loved to hear Gurudev's songs both in the morning and evenings. I was amazed to find all his movements beautiful, artistic and noble which I still remember vividly.

Then later on he went to Jorasanko with Gurudeva Rabin-dranath and stayed at No. 5 Dwarkanath Tagore Street and lived there in Jorasanko, Calcutta as a special guest of Gaganendranath, Samarendranath and the famous artist Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Sir John Woodroffe and others. There came also Professor William Rothenstein during 1909-1910.

—*Mukul Dey*

6

I believe I first saw Coomaraswamy in one of the houses standing on the grounds of the Indian Section of the Theosophical Society, Banaras. We were introduced to each other. This was in October or November, 1910. He had read some of my books and expressed appreciation of them. He was interested in fine arts of all kinds, old pictures of Mughal School and Rajput School, Kashmir shawls, old bronzes etc., and wished to attend the Exhibition which was to take place in the winter of 1910-1911 at Allahabad. Once I invited Coomaraswamy to stay with me. He came and stayed with me for some six weeks going to Allahabad often to visit the Exhibition, as I did also.

He came to Banaras again in 1916, I believe. He wanted very much to get a post in the Banaras Hindu University, as Professor of Indian Art and Culture. But it was not possible to get him one. So he went back to U. S. A. where he had already been appointed as curator of the Boston Museum. I cannot remember having seen him again. We exchanged letters infrequently and irregularly. He used to send me copies of his Museum Bulletin from time to time. He had carried away

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1. Coomaraswamy himself wrote an account of this memorable exhibition in the pages of the *Modern Review*.



with him four pictures of Moghul and Rajasthan Schools, selected from a portfolio of these in the possession of my younger brother Shri Sitaram. He wished to purchase this outright, but my brother was not willing to part with them for they were an heirloom. Soon Coomaraswamy reproduced this in a book on Indian Art of which he sent a copy to me – and returned the pictures. I now think that he did come to India once again, after Mahatma Gandhi's Non-co-operation movement began. He took away, as a present from me, many issues of the **Vedic Magazine** in which a series of valuable articles on **The Philosophy of Indian Engineering** had been published by Shri K. V. Vaze of Nasik – an engineer who had retired from Government service. He sent me one or two small pamphlets afterwards, in which he referred to some of my books.

—*Bhagwan Das*

7

Though Ceylonese by birth Coomaraswamy was virtually Indian, so thoroughly was he steeped in Indian Culture and thought. His knowledge was not acquired as by an outsider but gained as one native to the soil. To this he applied a rare detachment, due in large measure to his scientific education. But he did not treat his date in a mere mechanical spirit. He tried to understand with sympathy the deeper meaning underlying facts and correlate it to the evolutionary processes that went to form the ideals and aspirations of the people. His exposition therefore possesses a unique value. He was not concerned with defending the traditions of hieratic schools but with interpreting the realities which formed the foundations of Indian artistic and cultural achievement. His studies were not confined to India. His knowledge of other cultures gave him a breadth of view, and against this wide background he was quick to grasp the immense importance of India's contribution to world civi-

fization... His interpretations, made with the completest objectivity, touched a level not easy to attain.

—*B. S. Sitholey*

8

India, and those to have come to value the genius of India, owe much to Ananda Coomaraswamy. Together with Havell, he drove away the smoke-clouds which had too long obscured the splendid achievements of Indian Sculptors, painters and builders. The art of Greece and of Italy had alone to European – and indeed to Indian-eyes counted as great art. Only when Western scholars could detect influence in Indian carving and painting was their interest awakened. They failed to estimate, for example, the superb qualities, the overwhelming power of the Brahmanistic sculpture.

In his writings Coomaraswamy called insistent attention to the purely Indian character of the Indian genius. He had early discovered the peculiar beauty of the Rajput and Kangra paintings, more spiritual, hence more truly Indian, than those of the Mughal artists. Hitherto only Chinese, Japanese and Persian Art had been regarded as 'Fine Art.' In addition to his steadfast championing of painting, building and sculpture, Coomaraswamy's all embracing perceptiveness made him the sensitive interpreter of the subtle spirit of Indian literature and music. He collected folk songs from the Punjab, translated folk-poetry, interpreted the symbolic character of the Indian dance. His sympathy with the Indian Nationalist caused him to loosen his ties with England and America has had the benefit of his wide scholarship and understanding. But his writings have given him a secure place among Oriental scholars in East and West. Today if India takes her due rank as a first-class artistic power, it is in a large measure owing to Coomaraswamy.

—*William Rothenstein*

Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy is the first world-wide scholar I have known. His immense learning in Art, History, Theology, Symbolism, Religions, Psychology, Christianity and Greek Mythology awed me in our first private conversation. His intimate acquaintance with the details of the literary works of the Greeks, the Romans, the Church Fathers and Mystics as well as the labyrinthine ways of Hinduism and Buddhism rather startled me. His humility, his fair mindedness and the ease with which I could talk with him seemed amazing in the face of his vast scholarship.

Besides his learning and his humility there is one other quality of which I must speak. That is his physical grace. He was very tall and thin but straight and he moved with an extraordinary gracefulness. The raising of a hand in gesture was, while not in the least dramatic or studied, somehow beautiful. Perhaps it was the naturalness of his movement. Perhaps it was the reflection of the serenity of his soul, which is so rare a thing.

—Robert Winzer Bruce

I had heard of Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy when I was a student in the school ; when I joined the College I read some of his books on art. I met him once in Banaras. Ever since then I used to write to him when I felt that some things in his writings needed clarification and he was always kind enough to reply. Three of his letters are all that are left with me now.'

He was a master mind and a great seer in line with the Rishis of old. Many know him only as a great art critic. But to call him only an art-critic would not be doing full justice to him. He was deeply versed in the mythology of the various peoples of the world and had studied the writings of all the philosophers, saints and mystics with a thoroughness that was

unique. He dived in many waters and gathered pearls of wisdom of great price. With his penetrating insight, he sifted the essential from the non-essential and in his writings has bequeathed to humanity the **philosophia perennis** which is as ancient as the stars and will alone remain, while all the floating mass of pretty gossamers of fashionable philosophies will simply vanish into the thin air in course of time.

He had a wonderful synoptic vision and brought to bear his comparative and spiritual outlook on everything that he wrote—art, literature, mythology, philosophy and religion. It is his synoptic and spiritual outlook that have influenced me most in my life. He was a master of many languages and enriched his statements and conclusions with breath-taking parallelisms which were, however, never meant to adorn but only to impress the essential and the eternal truth. To the last moment he remained a master-light of all our seeing.’

—*Jaideva Singh*

11

To me Coomaraswamy was not only an art critic of the first order, but an historian, a philosopher, a statesman, a linguist, a diplomat, and of course a curator. Francis Bacon, as we know, took all learning to be his field. Didn't Coomaraswamy ?

What an encyclopedical knowledge he brought to his work. This, coupled with an inquiring mind and a most original approach, perhaps explains his great appeal not only to Easterners but also Westerners, a world appeal to be more embracing. I recall being struck with this in reading his ‘Why Exhibit Works of Art?’ in **Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art**. When he visualizes an exhibition of Greek objects his mind jumps to Plato. This leads to Platonic philosophy. This in turn causes Coomaraswamy to speculate as to why common objects, which were originally made for everyday use in the past and are now

resting in glass cases in museums, are of so much better quality than our things of everyday use. Because they were custom-made and made for use, our things are factory-made and made primarily for sale. Museum objects were made by free man creating things of beauty because he was working on what he liked to do. The true handicraftsman. Most men in our twentieth century are so busy earning a living that they have little interest in their job, the result is an ugly world. Here we have in the proverbial nutshell I believe Coomaraswamy's philosophy.

As a diplomat there is another facet of Coomaraswamy which I greatly admire. It is that continual and constant message of East-West cooperation and fellowship which runs through all his works. No one has striven harder or more successfully to educate the West in the ideals of the East or interpreted Buddha more effectively to the West. Perhaps it was that combination of Ceylonese father and English mother which enabled Coomaraswamy to render it easier for the Westerner to understand the East, while at the same time assisting the Easterner to realise the greatness of his own heritage. He was an emissary of Eastern culture to the West unfolding as he did the wisdom of the saints and philosophers from Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Taoism. And who was better qualified to do this than this peerless scholar.

*Cecil B. Lyon.*

12

Ananda Coomaraswamy is noted throughout the world as the interpreter of Indian cultural heritage and spiritual meaning to the world at large. As the author of the **Dance of Siva** and other works. Coomaraswamy more than anyone else, gave Indian scriptures and art their rightful place in world cultural history by placing them in the perspective of other world cultures particularly European and Middle Eastern. Such a reputation may lead one to imagine him to be a pedant with books and

obscure about the living reality around him. The aggressive idealism and intense feeling expressed in his political writing dispel any doubts we may have about the livingness of Coomaraswamy. Note, for instance, the strength of the feeling and harshness of the language to Mr. Arthur Sibly, his classmate and son of his Headmaster at Wycliffe College, England. His other letters to **The Nation**, New York<sup>1</sup> and to the **New English Weekly**, London reveal the same indignation he had for British atrocities in India when India under Gandhiji struggled for Independence. In his letters to the press he took up cudgels against British Ordinance Rule in India during Lord Willingdon's Viceroyalty.

Ananda Coomaraswamy's attitude to British rule in India, although it was that of a fervid nationalist, was very far from being based on any political or racial prejudice. He viewed the whole problem from a philosophic point of view. Although Coomaraswamy was half-English by ancestry he was, of course, an Indian nationalist by political conviction devoted to the principle of **Swaraj**. But he was just as vigorously opposed to what **Swaraj** meant to many of the Indians who wanted to copy British industrialism, to build factories and produce textiles using cheap labour in India. Ananda Coomaraswamy's ideas and ideals were very similar to those of his friend C. R. Ashber and their interests in the Arts and Crafts movement in England what originally brought them together. Naturally, Coomaraswamy was sympathetic to Mahatma Gandhi's efforts to revive hand-spinning and weaving as domestic industries in India.

*S. Durai Raja Sangam*

<sup>1</sup>, See Appendix



# APPENDICES





## APPENDIX 1

### SOME WRITINGS OF COOMARASWAMY

#### 1

#### **Mahatma**

[ Coomaraswamy was a great admirer of Gandhi. It is on record that he was one of those present at a London meeting (1908) to protest against Gandhi's imprisonment in South Africa. Among the distinguished persons present at that memorable meeting were Lala Lajpat Rai, Savarkar, Bepin Chandra Pal and Khaparde. Coomaraswamy made a speech at that memorable meeting in which he described Gandhi as 'The coming man of India'. Again, in 1914, at a meeting in London, he along with Jinnah and Sarojini Naidu paid glowing tributes to the hero of the South African struggle. When in 1920 the Non-cooperation movement was started under the leadership of Gandhi, Coomaraswamy came to India from Boston and it was at that time that he met Gandhi for the first time and gave his moral support to the movement. Gandhi, too, admired the sincere nationalist spirit of Coomaraswamy and his love for India. He read with interest and praised highly Coomaraswamy's **Essays in National Idealism**. It is worth recording here his observation on the aesthetic view of Gandhi just before his death. 'Gandhi can be looked upon as a moral saint. But not as an aesthetic saint. He said for example that a woman should not wear a necklace. Had he been an aesthetic saint, he would have said that if a necklace is worn then it should be a good necklace.'

When Gandhi attained his 70th year ( 1939 ), a commemoration volume was presented to him containing world's tributes

to the 'naked fakir.' This splendid book<sup>1</sup> was edited by no less a person than Dr. S. Radhakishnan who invited Ananda Coomaraswamy to contribute an article. He wrote a scholarly article entitled 'Mahatma', giving a convincing explanation of the origin, meaning and the interpretation of the term. ]

The term 'Mahatma' has been much abused, but has precise and intelligible meanings and a long history. Like many other of the technical terms of Indian metaphysics, the word has acquired vague or sentimental connotations; partly because in our general ignorance of all traditional philosophy and even of Christian theology we are no longer able to distinguish spirit from soul or essence from existence; and still more because of the absolute values we mistakenly attach to our boasted 'personality,' or rather, individuality, and consequent worship of 'genius', in which we see much rather a deified humanity than, the operation of an impersonal Spirit. It is with these preoccupations that we think of 'Mahatma' as meaning a 'Great Man', or 'Great Soul', rather than one who is 'in the spirit' and more than man.

At a point already far removed from the beginning we find in a Buddhist Sutra ( A. I. 249 ) the distinction drawn between the 'great' and 'petty' selves; **Mahatma** and **alpatma**; in another passage these 'selves' of a man are distinguished as 'fair' and 'foul' ( **Kalyana, papa** ). The foul or petty self is the composite of psychophysical factors by which a man can be referred as this man So-and-so and, as much, corresponds to all that is elsewhere defined as **anatma** ( not very self ) and of which it is so constantly affirmed that 'that is not my self' ( **na mama so ātmā** ). The way of this petty self is mean and painful ( **alpa-duḥkha-vihāri** ); it is 'undeveloped in stature, character, will and prescience.' The little self is in all respects causally determined; whatever it does or wills is pre-determined by what has been done or willed in a beginningless heredity of 'former habitations; 'we' can neither be what or as or when we will, but

1. **Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on his Life and Work**, 1939. ( Allen & Unwin, London. )

only what we are. The little self is mortal, subject in life to inveteracy and sickness, and destroyed without residue at the natural term of life. Our other and Eminent Self, the Mahatma can hardly be described except in terms which are negations of all the limiting definitions by which the little self is circumscribed. In terms of our first text, a man can be thought of as Mahatma who is 'of developed stature, character, will and prescience, un-emptied-out, and to whose way there are no boundaries' ( bhāṣita-kāy-sīla-citta, prajña, aprarikta mahātmā apramāṇa-vihāri ).

The whole distinction corresponds to that of Person from animal man ( **purusa** from **pasu** ) in A. A. II. 3. 2; to that of those who have not found the Self and for whom there is therefore no motion-at-will here or hereafter from those who have found the self and are therefore rest-at-will whether here or hereafter in C. U. VII. I. 6; to the Confucian distinction of the 'Princely Sage' ( chü-tzū ) from the 'petty man' ( hsia-jên ); and to St. Bernard's distinction of **proprium** from **esse**. These two 'selves' are again the 'lives' ( **anima, psyche** ) of John xii, 25, 'He that loveth his life shall lose it', one of these selves being that 'life' that a man must hate if he would be 'my disciple' ( Luke xiv. 26 ), the 'ego' of St. Paul's **vivo autem, jam non ego**. 'I live, yet not 'I'' ( Gal. ii 20 ). In 'Whosoever will lose his life for my sake' ( Luke ix. 24 ) this same **psyche** to be lost corresponds to all that is implied by 'psyche' in our word 'psychology'. To have found the ātman is to have ceased to anyone.

In **mahatma**, **maha** is simply 'great', 'eminent' : and **atman**, like Greek **pneuma**, primarily 'spirit' ( as distinguished from soul and body. But because the spirit is the real being of the man, as distinguished from the accident of this being, its temporal manifestation as So-and-so characterised by particular qualities and properties, **atman** in reflexive usage acquires the secondary value 'self,' whatever physical ( hylic ), psychic or spiritual ( pneumatic ) self we may intend. It is pre-

cisely at this point that the fundamental significance of the traditional and so often repeated injunction 'Know thyself', emerges, for we have 'forgotten what we are', and taking pride in being 'someone', are of those to whom the words of the Song of Songs, 'If thou Knowest not thyself, depart', can be applied. The answer to the question 'Who art thou?' is the password demanded at the Gate: it is only to those who can answer in accordance with the 'That art Thou' of the Upanisads that the welcome will be extended, 'Come in, O myself,' none who answers by a personal or family name is admitted. The condition of deification is an eradication of all otherness.

The term Mahātmā as name of God, and as a designation of the state of being that can be verified only by the man who is altogether emancipated from himself, is one, or one and many ( CU. VII. 26. 2. SB. X. 5. 2. 17 ) in distinction without difference, fusion without confusion. The Mahātmā is the 'Great Urban Spirit' ( mahān aja ātmā, BU. IV. 4. 22 : atma mahān KU. III. 10 ), the Supernal Sun ( MU. VII. 11. 6. ), the Spiritual Essence of all that is ( RV. I. 115. 1 ). The Great Self is the only Witness, Agent and Knower, at the same time immanent, and transcendent. To have found him is to have abandoned all the peripheries of our existence and returned to its centre of being. Hinduism and Buddhism affirm, what is not denied in Christianity, the possibility of the attainment of perfection here and now, as must be, because the state of perfection cannot itself be connected with time. In 'That art Thou', the present tense is absolute: it is not the truth, but its verification that has to do with time. When the verification has been made, the relation of 'individual, spirits to the Spiritual Deity is that of rays to the source of illumination from or into which they can pass in or out at will. To have become such a ray of the light of lights is divine filiation, for the Sun's rays are his offspring.

To call a man Mahātmā is then to say that he has been liberated in this life ( *jīvan mukta*, corresponding to the Buddhist *driste dharmavimukta* ) or in some life. It is thus

that the word is used in BG., e. g. VIII. 15, these Mahatmas that have come to Me, never again return to birth, to temporal abode of ill, they have reached the last fulfilment', and IX, B, 'Mahatmas devoted unto Me with single mind, knowing Me the unchanging source of all beings, that have taken on the nature of God'; Krishna, the speaker, being himself the immanent Spirit ( *ibid.*, X. 20 ).

Our object in the present article has been to explain the word Mahatma historically. The name has been given to Gandhiji by common consent, perhaps in the general sense of 'Saint'. There can be no doubt that in some of its connotations, that of selflessness ( with a higher sense than that of mere unselfishness ). for example, it can be properly applied to him. But we have not had in mind to discuss the applicability of the term in its full meaning to any individual ; for that must ever remain a secret between himself and God.

## 2

### At Seventy

More than half of my active life has been spent in Boston. I want to express my gratitude in the first place to the Directors and Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts, who have always left me entirely free to carry on research not only in the field of Indian art but at the same time in the wider field of the whole traditional theory of art and of the relation of man to his work, and in the fields of comparative religion and metaphysics to which the problems of iconography are a natural introduction. I am grateful also to the American Oriental Society whose Editors, however much they differed from by temperament and training, have always felt that I had a right to be heard and also have allowed me to be heard.

And all this despite the fact that such studies as I have made necessarily led me back to an enunciation of relatively unpopular sociological doctrines. For as a student of human manufac-

turers, aware that all making is **per artem**, I could not but see that as Ruskin said, Industry without art is brutality, and that men can never be really happy unless they bear an individual responsibility not only for what they do but for the kind and the quality of whatever they make. I could not fail to see that such happiness is forever denied to the majority under the conditions of making that are imposed upon them by what is euphemistically called 'free enterprise', that is to say, under the condition of production for profit rather than for use; and no less denied in those totalitarian forms of society in which the folk is as much as in a capitalistic regime reduced to the level of the proletariat.

Looking at the works of art that are considered worthy of preservation in our Museums, and that were once the common objects of the market place, I could not but realize that a society can only be considered truly civilized when it is possible for every man to earn his living by the very work he would rather be doing than anything else in the world—a condition that has only been attained in social orders integrated on the basis of vocation—**Svadharmā**.

At the same time I should like to emphasize that I have never built up a philosophy of mine or wished to establish a new school of thought. Perhaps the greatest thing I have learnt is never to think for myself; I fully agree with Andre Gide<sup>1</sup> that '**toutes choses sont dites dein**', and what I have sought is to understand what has been said, while taking no account of the 'inferior philosophers'. Holding with Heraclitus that the World is common to all, and that Wisdom is to know the Will whereby all things are steered, I am convinced with Jeremias that the human Cultures in all their apparent diversity are but the dialects of one and the same language of the Spirit, that there is a 'Common universe of discourse' transcending the differences of tongues.

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1. The noted French novelist and a Noble prize winner. Next to Romain-Rolland, Gide was intensely drawn to Coomaraswamy.

This is my seventieth birthday, and my opportunity to say Farewell. For this is our plan, mine and my wives, to retire and return to India next year, thinking this as an **astam gamana**, 'going home'...We mean to remain in India, now a free country, for the rest of our lives. I have not remained untouched by the religious philosophies I have studied and to which I was led by way of the history of art. **Intellige ut credas !** In my case, at least, understanding has involved belief; and for me the time has come to exchange the action for a more contemplative way of life in which it would be my hope to experience more immediately at least a part of the truth of which my understanding so far predominantly logical. And so, though I may be here for another year, I ask you also to say 'Good bye'—equally in the etymological sense of the word and in that of the Sanskrit **Svaga**, a salutation that expresses the wish 'May you come into your own', that is may I know and become what I am, no longer this man so and so, but the Self that is also the Being of all beings, my Self and your Self.<sup>1</sup>

### 3

#### **The Problem of Untouchability**

The problem of untouchability can only be understood in its historical context : throughout the ages, there has been going on a process of the acculturation by examples of aboriginal peoples, and the gradual absorption into the social hierarchy. It is only the sudden impact of modern condition and the consequent development of political and class conflicts ( often, deliberately exploited, if not provided by those where principle of government is **divide et impera** ) that have made the situation acute ... The feeling of ritual contamination that is

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1. The Harvard Club of Boston celebrated the 70th birthday of Ananda Coomaraswamy on August 22, 1947. On this occasion a commemoration volume ( Art and Thought ) embodying some forty contributions from admiring scholars all over the world was presented to him. This is an extract of the speech read by Coomaraswamy at the Farewell dinner.



felt by those whose life is disciplined and reserved, when brought in contact with those whose way of life and diet are much more promiscuous, is perfectly natural, it is not, like your colour prejudice, a denial of common humanity. It would be unreasonable to expect the Orthodox Hindu to admit all and sundry to their sacred precincts as it would be to expect them to admit you. The best answer to the problem was made by Swami Vivekananda, if the casteless or outcastes want to improve their position let them learn Sanskrit which means, adopt the higher and older standards of thinking and living that have only been preserved for millenia because those who practised them would not mix.

Mahatma Gandhi, universally regarded as a great spiritual force in the world, would like to resolve the untouchables' problem, but still believes in the theory of caste system. To do away with caste, to reduce all men to the condition of the modern proletarians who have no vocations but only 'jobs', would not be a solution but much rather a dissolution. To do away with caste, to reduce all men to the condition of the modern proletarians who have no vocations but only 'jobs', would not be a solution, but much rather a dissolution.

#### 4

### **The Religious basis of the forms of Indian Society**

A traditional social order, like that of India, is not a haphazard development but imitative of a theory or a body of principles or values that are understood to have been revealed and of which the truth is taken for granted. Institutions represent an application of metaphysical doctrines to contingent circumstances, and take on a local colour accordingly, changing with the times but maintaining throughout a high degree of stability, comparable to that of a living organism in which by the repeated process of death and rebirth that we call, 'becoming' or 'life', an existing order preserves a recognizable identity and

produces order from order. In the traditional society one respects established institutions, and if anything goes wrong one does not assume that it can be put right by institutional revolutions, but only by a change of mind, leaving the order itself unchanged; 'reformation' can only imply, what the world itself imports, a return to some form from which a deviation has taken place.

Every established custom has a metaphysical ( rather than biological or psychological ) *raison d'être*, for example, the whole pattern of marriage is founded upon the natural relations of the sun to the sky, or sky to the earth, which is also that of the Spiritual Authority to the Temporal Power. Morality is a matter of correct or 'skilful' procedure, and as in the case of art, a matter of *savoir faire*, of knowing what to do, rather than that of feeling, and where the cosmic pattern of 'good form' is unanimously accepted, public opinion sufficiently controls the whole situation. No one can be convicted of the irrationality of a custom unless his metaphysics can first be shown to be at fault. For example, it is not enough to detest and recoil from war, for if that is all we are liable to be persuaded by other plausible arguments when the crisis comes : we must ask ourselves whether or not the concept of man as an economically rather than spiritually determined nature, and consequent way of life dependent on world trade, have not made total wars inevitable : whether we have not simply 'desired peace, but not the things that make for peace.'

Much too often, men of good will are all ready to attack on unfamiliar institution, such as the caste system in India or elsewhere : without first asking what are its intentions, or whether these intentions, which are the values by which the given society lives and belongs to the essence of its 'morale', are likely to be realised by the new institutions which it is proposed to introduce from outside. In such cases it is overlooked that the forms of a traditional society make up a closely woven texture that may unravel and may become a mere tangle if one of its threads is pulled out; overlooked that styles of music

cannot be changed without affecting the whole constitution. It is an illusion to suppose that better worlds can be made by combining the best in one culture with the best in others : considered as means, such 'bests' are usually incompatible, and the actual effect of one's efforts is nearly always to combine the 'worsts'. We can only help one another to do better what each has already been trying to do; to demand of the other so to change as to be what we are, is to destroy his morale.

Caste is by no means synonymous with class, or in any sense a product of the race prejudices that are distinctive of Western, democratic peoples. It is very interesting to observe that in modern India, where the present ruling powers are anything but free from race prejudice, but as far as possible ignore caste, class distinctions have arisen in the services, where they are determined by the amount of salary received; and that a very high degree of social exclusiveness has developed there, as between men who may be doing the same kind of work, but are earning different salaries according to their 'grade'. It is hardly less instructive to observe that in the same services there is a discrimination by 'quota' against Brahmins, lest they should, by their greater intellectual abilities, 'usurp' all the most desirable positions; and in the same way tends to develop a sense of class conflict where none had existed previously.

For myself, I will only say that no day passes on which I do not search the Scriptures, and the works of the great theologians of all ages, so far as they are available to me in modern languages and in Latin, Greek, or Sanskrit, and that I am wholly convinced that **Una Veritas in Varris signis vaire resplendent**, and that this redounds **ad maiorem gloriam Dei** : a glory greater by far than by any creed or confined by the walls of any church or temple.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Extracts from the Address on 'The Religious basis of the forms of Indian Society' delivered by Coomaraswamy to the Student's Religious Association, Ann Astor, January 1946

## What India Has Contributed to Human Welfare ?

Each race contributes something essential to the world's civilization in the course of its own self-expression and self-realization. The character built up in solving its own problems, in the experience of its own misfortunes, is itself a gift which each offers to the world. The essential contribution of India, then, is simply her Indianness; her great humiliation would be to substitute or to have substituted for this own character ( **svabhava** ) a cosmopolitan veneer, for then indeed she must come before the world empty handed.

If now we ask what is most distinctive in this essential contribution, we first make it clear that there cannot be anything absolutely unique in the experience of any race. Its peculiarities will be chiefly a matter of selection and emphasis, certainly not a difference in specific humanity. If we regard the world as a family of nations, then we shall best understand the position of India which has passed through many experiences and solved many problems which younger races have hardly yet recognized. The heart and essence of the Indian experience is to be found in a constant intuition of the unity of all life, and the instinctive and ineradicable conviction that the recognition of this unity is the highest good and the uttermost freedom. All that India can offer to the world proceeds from her philosophy:

Where the Indian mind differs most from the average mind of modern Europe is in its view of the value of philosophy. In Europe and America the study of philosophy is regarded as an end in itself, and as such it seems of but little importance to the ordinary man. In India, on the contrary, philosophy is not regarded primarily as a mental gymnastic, but rather, and with deep religious conviction, as our salvation ( **moksha** ) from the ignorance ( **avidya** ) which forever hides from our eyes the vision of reality. Philosophy is the key to the map of life, by which are set forth the meaning of life and the means of attaining its goal.

It is no wonder, then, that the Indians have pursued the study of philosophy with enthusiasm, for these are matters that concern all.

Indian philosophy is essentially the creation of the two upper classes of society, the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas. To the latter are due most of its forward movements; to the former its elaboration, systematization, mythical representation, and application. The Brahmanas possessed not merely the genius for organization, but also the power to enforce their will: for, whatever may be the failings of the individuals, the Brahmanas as class are men whom other Hindus have always agreed to reverence, and still regard with highest respect and affection. The secret of their power is manifold; but it is above all in the nature of their appointed **dharma**, of study, teaching, and renunciation.

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India has nothing of more value to offer to the world than her religious philosophy, and her faith in the application of philosophy to social problems. A few words may be added on the present crisis and the relationship of East and West. Let us understand first that what we see in India is a cooperative society in a state of decline. Western Society has never been so highly organised, but in so far as it was organized, its disintegration has proceeded much further than is yet the case in India. And we may expect that Europe, having sunk into industrial competition first, will be the first to emerge. The seeds of a future cooperation have long been sown, and we can clearly recognize a conscious, and perhaps also an unconscious, effort towards reconstruction,

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The rapid degradation of Asia is an evil portent for the future of humanity and for the future of that Western social idealism of which the beginnings are already recognizable. If, either in ignorance or in contempt of Asia, constructive European thought omits to seek the cooperation of Eastern philosophers, there will come a time when Europe will not be able

to fight industrialism, because this enemy will be entrenched in Asia. It is not sufficient for the English colonies and America to protect themselves by imagination laws against cheap Asiatic labour; that is a merely temporary device, and likely to do more harm than good, even apart from its injustice. Nor will it be possible for the European nationalist ideal that every nation should choose its own form of government, and lead to its own life, to be realized, so long as the European nations have, or desire to have, possessions in Asia. What has to be secured is the conscious cooperation of East and West for common ends, not the subjection of either to the other, nor their lasting estrangement. For if Asia be not with Europe, she will be against her, and there may arise a terrible conflict economic, or even armed, between an idealistic Europe and a materialized Asia.

To put the matter in another way, we do not fully realize that debt that Europe already owes to Asiatic thought, for the discovery of Asia has hardly begun. And, on the other hand, Europe has inflicted terrible injuries upon Asia in modern times. I do not mean to say that the virus of 'civilization' would not have spread through Asia quite apart from any direct European attempts to effect such a result—quite on the contrary; but it cannot be denied that those who have been the unconscious instruments of the degradation of Asiatic society from the basis of *dharma* to the basis of contract have incurred a debt.

The 'clear air' of Asia is not merely a dream of the past. There is idealism, and there are idealists in modern India, even amongst those who have been corrupted by half a century of squalid education. We are not all deceived by the illusion of progress, but, like some of our European colleagues desire 'the coming of better conditions of life, when the whole world will again learn that the object of human life is not to waste it in a feverish anxiety and race after physical objects and comforts, but to use it in developing the mental, moral, and spiritual powers, latent in man.' The debt, then of Europe, can best be paid—and with infinite advantage to herself—by seeking

the coöperation of modern Asia in every adventure of the spirit which Europe would essay. It is true that this involves the hard surrender of the old idea that it is the mission of the West to civilize the East; but that somewhat Teutonic and Imperial view of **Kultur** is already discredited. What is needed for the common civilization of the world is the recognition of common problems, and to cooperate in their solution. If it be asked what inner riches India brings to aid in the realization of a civilization of the world, then, from the Indian standpoint, the answer must be found in her religions and her philosophy, and her constant application of abstract theory to practical life.<sup>1</sup>

## 6

### **The Goods of India**

The Vedas and Epics set forth several distinct cosmologies and myths of creation, and present us with a pantheon tantalisingly confused, with many functional doublets and a successive emergence of new names of the supreme and other deities, major and minor, only clarified here and there by an intuition that all these represent concepts of human origin imposed upon an ultimate ineffable One. Apart from this philosophic or mystic scission of the Gordian knot, is it possible to find a rational order in the actual theology? Obviously, this cannot be done by a tabulation of family relationships, functions, and myths, for the former are shifting and unconstant, and the latter never exclusively attached to any one individual. If at all, it can only be done by means of an historical untangling of the twisted threads.

Some light first appears when it is realised that Vedic theology presents us with a mixture of two conflicting types of divinity, Asuras and Devas, typically represented by Varuna and Indra, but Visnu ( Whose name is unimportant in the

1. First published in the 'Athenaeum', London, 1915; then subsequently included in **The Dance of Siva**.

( Vedas ) who emerges as the great king of righteousness, cosmic ruler, and ultimate ideal. This Visnu, alike in majesty and moral grandeur, and in matters of mythology and iconographic formulation, is more like Varuna, himself the noblest conception of the Vedas, than any other of the older gods. Thus, in brief, Varuna is the lord of holy order, and Visnu, particularly as conceived in the person of Rama, embodies the Hindu concept of righteousness; and are not **ṛta** and **dharma** one and the same eternal Law ? Both Varuna and Visnu are types of the ideal king upon whose virtue ( **virya**, 'mana' ) depend the fall of rain in due season and the fruitfulness of the earth. The actual creation proceeds from a tree that springs from Varuna's navel as he rests upon the primeval waters; and in turn, from a demiurge who is lotus-born from a stem that springs from Visnu's navel as he too lies recumbent on the Waters at the commencement of a new cycle of creation. Varuna and Visnu are each of the colour of the firmament. The identity of Varuna and Visnu is actually asserted in the **Agni Purana**.

Has the conception, then, of the Great King of the Universe persisted dominant from a time before the Vedas to the present day ? It is true that Varuna, **under this name**, declined to a lesser status as god of the sea, and that it is customary to differentiate sharply the Epic from the Vedic mythology. In reality, the continuity is veiled only thinly by changes of name. There is a succession of cosmic progenitive deities, Prajāpati, Visvakarman, the Unborn, the Self-Existent, **Brahma**, **Narayana**, and of related types, Tvaṣṭr, Daksa, whose names are for the most part epithets; and with these are connected many of the myths and conceptions elsewhere attached to Varuna and Visnu. These epithets do not represent new deities, but are designations reflecting the imagination of successive periods, and usurping the place of older names which of necessity therefore retained only a more limited application or connotation. That at any one time a given deity has countless names and epithets is a familiar fact of Indian, and indeed of other mythologies.



We recognize, for example, the identity of Kubera and Vaisravaṇa, even that of Kubera and Jambhala, or Kubera and Pan-cika; and it is no less proper to recognize an identity in any deity whose names and epithets are distributed along the line of time, when the evidence of persistent character and myths is available,

Somewhat similarly the Asura deity Agni, originally a great cosmic principle, becomes merely the god of fire and messenger of the gods, while much of his character and myths are inherited by the red god, the 'blue-throated' Siva-Rudra.

To take another case, a feature typical of Hindu theology is the conception of the supreme deity as Two-in-One – Purusa and Prakriti, Siva-Sakti, Lakṣmi-Narayana, etc. This concept of polar types, supreme Male and Mother-Mate, appears from the beginning in Varuna and Aditi. Are not Aditi, Idā, Vāk, Gauri, Lakṣmi, in fact the Devi in every aspect one and the same? So too with lesser genii: the Gandharvas and Apsarasas, originally the 'people' of Varuna and Soma powerful and even dread progenitive deities, soon come to be no more than the musicians and dancers of Indra's court, but their original character and functions are carried on by the Yaksas and Yaksis. Yakṣa was once a term of high respect, and there is no Indian deity, however exalted, who is not in one place or another referred to by this title; nor even in later times are the Yaksas anywhere clearly distinguished from other deities and spirits, all of whom, except only the Supreme Cosmic God, have once been men and will in due course be reborn as men.

Again, the oldest cosmology is a belief in the origin of life in the Waters and its perpetuation and renewal by means of the soma or rasa, an Essence in the Waters that has for its iconography the Plant Style as we find it when Indian art is first extensively preserved in permanent material, and as this so-called 'decorative' art has persisted to the present day.

The Hinduism emerges, not as a post-Vedic Development, a theistic declension from the lofty visions of the Upanisads,

but as something handed on from a prehistoric past, ever-changing and yet ever essentially itself, raised at various times by devotional ecstasy and philosophic speculation to heights beyond the grasp of thought, and yet preserving in its popular aspects the most archaic rites and animistic imagery.

Behind Varuna and Aditi, Ahura Mazda and Anāhita, lie Tammuz and Istar. All goes back to early cultures dependent on agriculture and irrigation, ultimately to a time when theology was hardly yet conceived, but welfare seemed to depend on a mysterious energy underlying all the operations of life, an energy scarcely personified, but which could be instigated, by rites of sacrifice and sympathetic magic. A 'god' then implied, not a known person, but a dramatization of a man's direct experience of forest or river, cloud or mountain, birth or death. A combination of many such experiences induced the view that behind them lay a person or persons whose character might be inferred from that of the manifestations themselves, and who could be pleased or displeased; and hence arose theology and worship, distinct from magic. It is the peculiar value of India to the student of humanity that we find here not only an age-long historical continuity extending from prehistoric times to the present day, but even at the present day every essential stage of the development, from the worship of the Vegetative powers to the knowledge of the Self that is 'Not so.' At all times the gods have assumed the forms imagined by their worshippers; their lineaments are a function of the relation between the worshipper and the object of his devotion. Nothing has been rejected, but all finds its place in a graduated synthesis of elements adopted to every mental age; and here only therefore has the true meaning of tolerance been understood, here only could it have been said, believed, and acted upon that true teaching consists not in imparting a new kind of truth, but in assisting men to understand still better their own kind of truth.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Originally published in 'The golden Book of Tagore'...a magnificent commemoration volume presented to Rabindranath on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in 1931.

### **The Mahabharata**

The Indian national saga, beyond all dispute, is the Mahabharata. It is the most popular of all sacred books. It contains, as an interlude, the Bhagavad Gita, the national gospel. But with this it is also an epic, the main theme of which is a great battle waged between two families of cousins...the Pandavas and the Kauravas. And although after the fashion of ancient literature, a thousand other tales, some more, some less ancient, have been included in its interstices, yet this great drama moves on, full of swiftness and colour, from one end of the poem to the other. It is marked by extraordinary vividness and richness of imagination. But perhaps most of us remembering that the work is ancient, will be still more impressed by the subtlety and modernness of the social inter-course which it portrays.

The outstanding fact to be realized about the epic, however, is that from end to end its main interest is held and centred on character. We are witnessing the law that, as the oyster makes its own shell, so the mind of man creates and necessitates his own life and fate. The whole philosophy of India, particularly the social philosophy is implicit in this epic, just as it is in the common household life. The Mahabharata constitutes, and is intended to constitute, a supreme appeal to the heart and conscience of every generation. For more than the national tradition, it embodies the national morality and social ethics. Not the least significant of Vyasadev's epic lies in its remarkable presentation of ideal society. He thus throws into the strongest relief the contrast of good and evil, as these values presented themselves to the shapers of Hindu society. For it should be understood that not only the law givers, like Manu, but also the poets of ancient India, conceived of their own literary art, not as an end in itself, but entirely as a means to an end, the nearest possible realization of an ideal society. The poets were practical sociologists, using the great power of their art, deli-

berately to mould the development of human institutions and to lay down ideals for all classes of men<sup>1</sup>

8

**Aesthetics and Relationships of Jaina Paintings**

The Jaina manuscripts, although the illuminated examples are far from common, constitute the chief exception to the general rule that Indian manuscripts are not illustrated. It will be seen, however, that there is no attempt at an organic relationship of text and illustrations, such as always appear in Persian manuscripts. The Jaina miniature is simply a square or oblong picture that looks as if it had been pasted on to the page, rather than designed as a part of it. This may not arise so much from the fact that the painter and writer must have separate persons, as from the fact that Indian painting was highly developed long before the sacred books were habitually preserved in written form.

We are familiar with the striking continuity of the traditions of Buddhist painting: to give only one example, compare the white Elephant Gift ( Vessantara Jataka ) as represented at Degaldoruva in Ceylon ( 18th century : my **Medieval Sinhalese Art**, frontispiece ) with the same subject represented at Miran ( 2nd Century; Stein, *Desert Cathay*, figure 147 ); the latter example, and indeed both must reflect still older Indian models. Just the same must be true of the illustrations to the lines of the Jinas; probably nothing in the composition is due to the 15th century painter, just as nothing in the text is due to the 15th century scribe. This does not mean, of course, that the Jaina art has not varied in style, nor that the details of costume, architecture and manners may not largely reflect the painter's own environment, nor that there is no diversity of merit in the mediaeval works; it means that we had before us

1. Extract from the book **Myths of Hindus and Buddhists** ( 1914 ); some chapters of it were written by Sister Nivedita.

Jaina paintings of the 15th century, or even earlier; we should most likely recognize in them compositions almost identical, as such, with many of those in the 15th century books and later.

Probably the illustrations to the *Kalakacaryakathanakam* have not so old an ancestry. The story itself is of later origin, and I should suppose the compositions may not go further back than the 10th century. On the whole, they are decidedly less formal and more anecdotal than those accompanying the lives of the Jinas.

In any case, we have before us a purely Indian art derived like Rajput and Orissa painting, and the late Buddhist art of Ceylon, from old traditions; but carrying us further back in actual examples than either of these.

If we seek for definite parallels, other than such obvious resemblances as that of the figure of a seated Jina to a seated Buddha, we are reminded first of the illustrations to the oldest Nepalese palm-leaf Mss of *Prajnaparamita*, etc. These illustrations likewise take the form of square frames let into the text very much as in the manuscripts. These are also resemblances in the matters of detail: thus, the curious sloping throne ( a perspective representation ? ) seems to be derived from architectural canopies of the earlier art. There are also striking reminiscences of the Nepalese manner of drawing hands and feet, and general feeling for outline. Also the colouring where gold is not employed, or only to an insignificant extent, recalls old Buddhist art.

The pictures are filled with characteristically Indian and ancient motifs : for example the constant representation of hamsa, peacocks, lions and elephants, the occasional purely decorative use of the lotus to fill empty spaces ( cf. 18th century Sinhalese Buddhist paintings ); the fondness for clouds ( which have no likeness to Chinese or Persian formulas ); the conventions for water, the Hindu costumes ( such as dhoti-note the hamsa and diaper designs of the printed cotton of woven saris, etc. ); the lion thrones ( *simhasana* ); and the bending of trees

( drumahatir ) towards the holy man ( cf. Ramayana, exile of Rama— 'the trees incline their heads towards him' ). The plain domed arch is of makara torana origin; the same is doubtless true of the cusped arches which give no proofs of contemporary Persian influences, as they occur also in Nepalese art of the 9th century, and the upper frize of the Visvakarma Cave temple of Elura, still earlier. The distinctively Persian costume of the Sahis in Kalakacar pictures cannot be said to prove more than an acquaintance with Persian customs.

The physical type is rather peculiar, the very sharp-hooked nose and large eyes being especially striking. The sword-edged nose is also characteristic of mediaeval Nepalese bronzes and Orissa sculptures and was admired in the most Hindu circles ( in Vidyapati, a beautiful woman's nose is compared to Guruda's beak ) it was nevertheless a feature no less admirable in the eyes of the Persians. The large eyes are of course characteristics of all Indian art but they are here drawn in a peculiar manner, not as in Nepalese or Rajput paintings. The further eye is made to project from the outline of the cheek in a most extraordinary way. The prolongation of the outer corner of the eye, almost to meet a ear, is also remarkable : it corresponds to characteristic passages in Hindu literature. Nevertheless, this elongation of the eye by a single fine line stretching to the year is not quite like anything, that is familiar in either schools of Indian painting, while it very strongly recalls the drawings of the 12th and the 13th century Rhages pottery, and seems to me to constitute the most definite suggestion of relationship to Persian Art that these Jaina miniatures afford. The use of gold leaf possibly points in the same direction.

The parallels with Rajput painting are naturally closer. Thus, in the diksa scene, Mahavira is represented with a lion waist and hugely developed chest, and there are many figures where it would be difficult at first sight to distinguish the representations as those of men or women. This recalls the mannerism of the large risna cartoons from Jaipur ( *ostasiatische Zeitschrift* 1, 2, fig. 1 : Indian Drawings, II, Plates 2 & 3).

We have already remarked that the representation of clouds is anything but Persian or Chinese in manner, on the other hand, it is by no means unlike the manner of the earlier Pahari and Rajasthani paintings ( 17th century Jammu district and Rajputana—and not 18th century Kangra), where a narrow band of dark blue storm-cloud is constantly introduced above the high horizon. It will not be forgotten that the monsoon clouds in India are as much liked and desired as blue sky in northern Europe. Another resemblance of Rajput Art ( Jammu ) appears in the strong red background ( also in old Nepalese and late Sinhalese, etc. )

The architecture in the paintings resembles that of Gujarat where most of the miniatures must have been painted. On the whole, the archaeological interest of Jaina painting exceeds its aesthetic significance. In most of the manuscripts the drawing is indeed very highly accomplished, but rather of a workshop character than deeply felt. Many of the miniatures are overcrowded with detail, the statement of fact rather than the expression of emotion. But in some cases the aesthetic values are much higher. The diksa scene ( Tonsure of Mahavira ), though it conforms to the usual type in most detail of composition, attain to far greater dignity, and is comparable in passion with the noble passage of the Kalpa Sutra which begins 'Reverence to the Saints, and Blessed ones...' That emotion is really expressed in the picture, which led the chief of the gods to descend from heaven and kneel with an offering before the Wise one. As elsewhere in Indian literature and art ( the Great Renunciation of Buddha, Arjuna's penance, etc. ), we are made to feel that the going forth of the horasaint is an event of cosmic and more than temporal significance. Like Blake, the poet thought that 'there were listeners in other worlds than this.' Such examples go far to prove that there must once have existed Indian schools of Jaina painting comparable with the classic Buddhist art of Ajanta.

Within more secular limits, some of the Kalukacharya pictures have excellent qualities. The Sahi upon his throne is

admirably designed; The vertically striped robe, as well as the pose give an impression of great repose and dignity. Other pictures, such as that of the magic ass, are distinctly amusing, though the humour may be quite unconscious.<sup>1</sup>

9

### **Philosophy of Art**

The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man who is not an artist in some field, every man without a vocation, is an idler. The kind of artist that a man should be, carpenter, Painter lawyer, farmer or priest, is determined by his own nature, in other words by his nativity. No man has a right to any social status who is not an artist.

There can be no doubt about the purpose of art in a traditional society : when it has been decided that such and such a thing should be made, it is **by art** : that is, no good use of things are not properly made. The artist is producing a utility, something to be used. Mere pleasure is not a use from this point of view. In the philosophy that we are considering, only the contemplative and active lives are reckoned human. The life of pleasure only, one of which the end is pleasure, is sub-human; every animal 'knows what it likes', and seeks for it. This is not an exclusion of pleasure from life as if pleasure were wrong in itself, it is an exclusion of the pursuit of pleasure thought of as a diversion and apart from 'life'. It is in life itself, in proper operation, that pleasure arises naturally, and this very pleasure is said to perfect the operation itself.

We need hardly say that from the traditional point of view there could hardly be found a stronger condemnation of the present social order than in the fact that the man at work is no longer doing what he likes best, but rather what he must, and in the general belief that a man can really be happy

1. Extract from **Notes on Jaina Art** : Coomaraswamy



when he 'gets away' and is at play. For even if we mean by 'happy' to enjoy the 'higher things of life', it is a cruel error to pretend that this can be done at leisure if it has not been done at work. For the man devoted to his own vocation finds perfection... That man whose prayer and praise of God are in the doing of his own work perfects himself. It is this way of life that our civilization denies to the vast majority of men.

Manufacture, the practise of art, is thus not only the production of utilities but in the highest possible sense the education of men. It can never be, unless for the sentimentalist who lives for pleasure, an 'art for art's sake', that is to say a production of 'fine' or useless objects only that we may be delighted by 'fine' colours and sounds; neither can we speak of our traditional art as a 'decorative' art, for to think of decoration as its essence would be the same as to think of millinery as the essence of costume or upholstery as the essence of furniture. The greater part of our boasted 'love of art' is nothing but the enjoyment of comfortable feelings. One had better be an artist than go about 'loving art'.

In our traditional view of art, in folk art, Christian and oriental art, there is no essential distinction of a fine and useless art from a utilitarian craftsmanship. There is no distinction of things well and truly made from things not so made and of what is beautiful from what is ugly in terms of formality and informality. But, you may object, do not some things serve the uses of the spirit or intellect, and others those of the body; is not a symphony nobler than a bomb, an icon than a fireplace? Let us first of all beware of confusing art with ethics. The distinction of artistic from moral sin which is so sharply drawn in Christian philosophy can be recognised in Confucious, who speaks of a succession of dance as being 'at the same time perfect beauty and perfect goodness' and of the dance as being 'perfect beauty but not perfect goodness.' It will be obvious that there can be no moral judgement of art itself, since it is not an act but a kind of knowledge or power by which things can be

well made, whether for good or evil use : the art by which utilities are produced cannot be judged morally, because it is not a kind of willing but a kind of knowing.

The work of art is good of its kind, or not good at all; its excellence is as independent of our reactions to its aesthetic surfaces as it is of our moral reaction to its theses. Just as the artist conceives the form the thing to be made only after he has consented to the patron's will, so we, if we are to judge as the artist could, must already have consented to the existence of the object before we can be free to compare its actual shape with its prototype in the artist.

The perfection of the object is something of which the critic cannot judge, its beauty something that he cannot feel, if he has not like the original artist made himself such as the thing itself should be; it is in this way that 'criticism is reproduction', and 'judgment the perfection of art.' The 'appreciation of art' must not be confused with a psycho-analysis of our likes and dislikes, dignified by the name of 'aesthetic reactions': The study of art, if it is to have any cultural value will demand two far more difficult operations than this, in the first place an understanding and acceptance of the whole point of view from which the necessity for the work arose, and in the second place a bringing to life in ourselves of the form in which the artist conceived the work and by which he judged it. The student of art, if he is to do more than accumulate facts, must also sacrifice himself : the wider the scope of his study in time and space, the more must he cease to be a provincial, the more he must universalize himself, whatever may be his own temperament and training. He must assimilate whole cultures that seem strange to him, and must also be able to elevate his own levels of reference from those of observation to that of the vision of ideal forms. He must rather love than be curious about the subject of his study. It is just because so much is demanded that the study of art can have a cultural value, that is to say may become a means of growth.

Works of art consistent with the *Philosophia Perennis* cannot be divided into the categories of the utilitarian and the spiritual, but pertain to both worlds, functional and significant, physical and metaphysical...The anonymity of the artist belongs to a type of culture dominated by the longing to be liberated from one self. All the force of this philosophy is directed against the delusion 'I am the doer.' 'I' am not in fact the doer, but the instrument; human individuality is not an end but only a means. The supreme achievement of individual consciousness is to lose or find (both words mean the same) itself in what is both its first beginning and its last end.<sup>1</sup>

## 10

### Paintings of Tagore

An exhibition of drawings by Rabindranath Tagore is of particular interest because it puts before us, almost for the first time, genuine examples of modern primitive art. One may well wonder how those artists and critics who have so long striven for and praised the more calculated primitivisms, archaisms and pseudo barbarisms of European origin will respond; will they admire the real thing ?

Because Rabindranath is a great and sophisticated poet, a citizen of the world, acquainted with life by personal experience, and by familiarity with the history of culture in Asia and Europe, it must be inferred that these paintings, all a product of the last two years of the poet's activity, are sophisticated or metaphysical. It would be a great mistake to search in them for

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. Extracts from the book 'Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art' (formerly titled 'Why Exhibit Works of Art?'), Coomaraswamy regarded art as a way of life and he defined it as the embodiment in material of a preconceived form. In the first of the nine most stimulating and provocative essays Coomaraswamy discusses such matters as the true functions of aesthetic in art, the importance of symbolism and the importance of intellectual philosophic background for the artist. The other essays discuss the common philosophy which pervades all truly great art.

hidden spiritual symbolisms; they are not meant to be deciphered like puzzles or code messages. Nor do they bear any definite relation to the contemporary Bengali school of painting led by his nephews Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore, or to the contemporary movement elsewhere. It is obvious that the poet must have looked at many pictures in the course of his long life, but there is nothing in his own work to show that he has seen them. This is a genuinely original, genuinely naive expression; extraordinary evidence of eternal youth persistent in a hoary and venerable personage.

Childlike, but not childish. It is perfectly legitimate to be amused by, to laugh at, or with, some of these creations, as one is amused by a child's vision of the world; it is not legitimate to ridicule them. From a few examples one might gather that the artist 'knows how to draw'; but this is not a consistent quality, and it would be as much beside the mark to praise this apparent knowledge when it appears, as to criticise the work as a whole as that of a man who does not know how to draw. In these days we have become familiar with the cult of incompetence, and have professed to admire the work of countless artists who do not know how to draw, and in addition have voiced sufficiently loudly their contempt of training. Rabindranath, on the other hand, has no contempt for training or virtuosity; he simply does not possess it, and knowing this he puts before us in all simplicity, certainly not cynically, the creations of his playful vision, for us to use as well will. There is, indeed, one quality in respect of which these pictures may be called at once typically Indian, and adult in spite of their naivete; this quality finds expression in satisfying composition, clear cut rhythms and definition of forms.

They do not mean definite things, but are in themselves definite; in this sense they may be called truly mystical, and offer a refreshing contrast to the vague and sentimental works of the pseudomystics, in which more recognizable forms appear, but which nonetheless 'sprechen immer nur im Luft herein.' A com-

parison with the work of William Blake is naturally suggested; for here too was a mystic poet who from the resources of a vivid visual imagination created forms not to be seen in nature, but yet endowed with the precision and definition of natural forms. The parallel can be carried even further; for most of the work of the Blake is actually a kind of marginal comment to poetry; while the separate paintings now exhibited by Rabindranath are actually, as he himself tells us, a development from marginal and interlinear penplay enjoyed when composing, or correcting manuscript.

The poet gives no descriptive titles to his pictures-how could he ? They are not pictures about things, but pictures about himself. In this sense they are probably much nearer to his music than to his poetry. In the poetry, so far at least as the content is concerned, he is not primarily an inventor, but rather the sensitive exponent of a racial or national tradition, and therefore his words are more profoundly sanctioned and more significant than those of any private genius could be; all India speaks and understands the same language. The poetry reveals nothing of the poet's personality, though it establishes his status. But the painting is an intimacy comparable to the publication of private correspondence. What a varied and colourful person is revealed ! One picture that might be taken for a representation of a cross between Shylock and Ivan the Terrible, has qualities strangely suggestive of a stained glass window; others, in the poet's own words, depict 'the temperate exaggeration of a probable animal that had unaccountably missed its chance of existence', or a 'bird that can only soar in our dreams and finds its rest in some hospitable lines that we may offer it in our canvas'; in others, human seriousness is made ridiculous by animal caricature; others representing a crowd attentive to a flute player may embody some allusion both to Krishna, and to the call of the infinite in the poet's own songs; another is a dancing Ganesa, far removed from the canons of Hindu iconography; the 'conference of birds' is incidentally a comment on the League of Nation's; there are portraits, including one of a young Bengali girl, the

direct antithesis of 'Ivan the Terrible'; groupings of coloured flowers; pages of actual manuscript; and soft ethereal landscapes. The manner is as varied as the theme, and this despite the fact that all the pictures are done with a pen, usually the back of a fountain pen, and coloured inks or tints; any method is employed that may be available or that may suggest itself at the moment. The artist, like a child, invents his own technique as he goes along; nothing has been allowed to interfere with zest. The means are always adequate to the end in view: this end is not 'Art' with a capital A, on the one hand -- nor, on the other, a merely pathological self-expression; not art intended to improve our minds, nor to provide for the artist himself an 'escape'; but without ulterior motives, truly innocent, like the creation of a universe.<sup>1</sup>

11

**Four Days in Orissa**

Four days is not a long time to spend in Orissa : but it is time enough to see much. Puri itself is not especially impressive. Great cities of the South, like Madura much more completely realise one's idea of an Indian Cathedral town, though their architecture may be less simple and impressive. Puri consists of an old town with one broad procession road and many smaller streets surrounding the great temple; and a new and very English suburb on the shore. There is a rather an amusing contrast between this seaside watering place with its nursemaids and babies on the sands, and the old religious City of the Lord of the World ( Jagannatha—the 'Juggernaut' of Anglo-India literature ). Old Puri by all accounts seems to have been a very pestilential and insanitary place, and pilgrims died in thousands, even if they survived the robbers and other dangers of a journey

1. C omaraswamy was an admirer of Tagore's paintings. He wrote a booklet which was published on the occasion of an the exhibition in New York in 1930.

through Orissa. The old story of the self immolation of pilgrims beneath the car on which the God is annually dragged along the procession path are now sufficiently refuted: but it will be long before the fable disappears from the pages of missionary literature. Not the least interesting things in Puri are the people themselves, the Uriyas. The men are often very beautiful, sometimes decidedly effeminate : the priests and pandas not very learned or intelligent. Few of the people speak any language other than Uriya. Bengali is better known than Hindi.

Reaching Puri in the morning by night train from Calcutta, one may leave the same evening by palki ( Palanquin ) for Konarak, 20 miles away along the seashore. Starting at 7 it is possible to reach Konarak by 1 or 2 A. M. and sleep well before the morning. Weeks could be spent in studying detail at Konarak : But unless serious work is proposed, a day will suffice, and a return to Puri can be made the same evening. There is a comfortable bangalow at Konarak, but provisions are not obtainable. Since Rajendralal Mitra's<sup>1</sup> great book on the antiquities of Orissa, the partially ruined 'Black Pagoda', which stands alone in a great sandy waste, has been excavated and sufficiently restored to prevent further destruction. The temple is not only unique as a Sun-Temple, but is in itself both architecturally and in the details of its sculpture, one of the noblest monuments of Indian mediaeval art. The date of its erection is said to be about 1250 A. D....contemporary with the finest period of European architecture. The main building is represented as resting on enormous wheels and drawn by spirited horses. The whole building is covered with a profusion of remarkable and beautiful carvings symbolising the fertilising and creative power of the Sun. It is a Hymn to life, a frank and exquisite glorification of creative forces in the Universe.

The unusual predominance of this kind of sculpture at Konarak is to be explained, as I have pointed out, as symbolis-

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1. A noted Indologist and the first Indian President of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal ( now the Asiatic Society )

ing the power of the sun : but similar carvings occur in smaller proportionate quantity in many other places. Love and desire are part of life. Life is a veil behind or within which is God. The outside of the temple is an image of this life, samsara, and the carvings on it represent everything that belongs to samsara and perpetuates illusion, every bond and each desire of loveliness that binds men to the wheel of life and death. Within, in an empty chamber, the image of God is alone, lit up by tiny lamps seen from very far away by the approaching worshipper. This symbolism of phenomenal life as an embroidered veil beyond which the devotee must pass to find his God, has perhaps always and everywhere been present, whether consciously or not, in the mind of Indian cathedral-builders.

The four main entrances of the temple are guarded by pairs of rampant animals. Those on the south side are horses trampling down armed men. One of these great horses, with a warrior striding beside it has a majestic and monumental grandeur which give it rank amongst the finest heroic sculpture in the world. Of smaller sculptures on the main building, besides those already referred to, there are many of different sorts of chimaeras, gryphons and monsters and others of beautiful women. Some of the monsters vividly recall the finest Gothic treatment of grotesque forms : the creature illustrated in Figure 4 would be quite at home with all the splendid gargoyls on Notre-Dame.

Not the least suprising thing at Konarak is the evidence of engineering skill afforded. How did the builders raise the great stones that crown such buildings as this ? How did they transport the great mass of chlorite on which the forms of the planets are carved, 80 miles from the nearest hills where this stone is found, across swamps and rivers, to Konarak ? When an attempt was made to transport this block to Calcutta, it had to be abandoned after moving 200 yards. The stone is now worshipped and there is an annual **mela** ( Fair ) attended by about half a lakh of people. Besides the rough shed which serves as a temple in this connection there is also a small **matt** at



Konarak near to the great temple. An English visitor sometime ago presented the incumbent with the price of a pukka roof to cover the adytum to the shrine, and this has since been completed.

From Puri one may proceed by the evening train to Bhubaneswar, and sleep either at the station or at the Udaygiri rest house, four miles away. If one day is spent on a hasty visit to the principal temples in Bhubaneswar, the following evening train to Calcutta may be taken. But if Bhubaneswar is to be properly seen, and the Buddhist monuments at Udaygiri and Khandagiri are also to be visited, a stay of at least three days is necessary.

The first temple passed on the road from the station to Bhubaneswar is small and unimportant, but particularly simple and dignified. The great tower—on which one may often observe parties of monkeys rerebling—is very impressive and contrasts with the simple horizontal lines of the smaller temple near the road. The two are typical examples of the best Orissan architecture. Bhubaneswar itself once consisted of 7000 shrines surrounding a sacred lake. There remain now some 500 of these, more or less ruined. One is strongly reminded of the much older city of Anuradhapura in Ceylone where also many ruined shrines remain in a parklike and partly jungle covered country. Many of the shrines at Bhubaneswar however are not to be described as ruined: in particular the great temple built in the seventh century, 'perhaps the finest example of a purely Hindu temple in India', is well preserved. It stands within an enclosure of high walls seven feet thick, together with many more modern temples. The most important and beautiful of these are the Nat and Bhog mandirs, additions to the original temple made at the beginning of the twelfth century. This temple is visited by pilgrims and served by many priests. There are in other parts of Bhubaneswar many deserted temples well preserved, nearly all of which have special interest of beauty of their own. That known as Mukteswar is most elaborately carved and is one of many standing beside a beautiful stone-

walled tank in a grassy grove called Siddharanya. Beyond this is the temple known Raj Rani surrounded by a low palisade of laterite pillars. There is much beautiful sculpture well-preserved here ( again recalling vividly the general character of Gothic ) as well as some excellent modern work where judicious restorations have been made. This modern work is almost as good as the old and fully justifies Mr. Havell's remarks on this subject are living arts in India suffering only from wanton and deliberate neglect on the part of the government and private builders. It is not likely however that public taste in Bengal at the present day would find good Indian architecture endurable : bad European is very much preferred.

There are, besides these restorations in some of the temples at Orissa, some small and unpretentious modern houses in Bhubaneswar of most marked architectural merit. Of old buildings other than temples, the most remarkable is the very stately matt near a corner of the main road to the great Temple.

Such is a very brief account of a short architectural pilgrimage in Orissa. Its purpose will be served if it should serve to persuade anyone else to visit or revisit these beautiful and little known places, and to take an interest both in their ancient architecture and in their living modern architects and sculptures.<sup>1</sup>

## 12

### **Indian Images with many arms**

Certain writers, speaking of the many-armed images of Indian art, have treated this peculiarity as an unpardonable defect. 'After 300 A.D.' says Mr. Vincent Smith, 'Indian sculpture properly so-called hardly deserves to be reckoned as art. The figures both of men and animals become stiff and formal, and the idea of power is clumsily expressed by the multiplication

1. Reproduced from the **Modern Review**, April 1911.

of members. The many-headed, many-armed gods and goddesses whose images crowd the walls and roofs of medieval temples have no pretensions to beauty, and are frequently hideous deities with animals' heads and innumerable arms.' Sir George Birdwood considers that 'the monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation; and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown as fine arts in India.' Quotations of this kind could be multiplied, but enough has been given to show that for a certain class of critics there exists the underlying assumption that in Indian art the multiplication of limbs or heads, or addition of any animal attributes, is in itself a very grave defect, and fatal to any claim for merit in the works concerned.

In reply to criticisms of this kind it would be useless to cite examples of Greek art such as the victory of samothrace or the head of Hypnos : of Egyptian, such as the figures of Sekhet or other animal divinities; of Byzantine or medieval angels : of modern works such as some of M. Rodin's. For it is clear that all these, if the critics be consistent, must suffer equal condemnation.

The condemnations quoted are certainly to be justified if we are to agree to find the final aim of art in representation: then let us seek for the most attractive models and carefully copy them. But this test of verisimilitude has never been more than the result of a popular misunderstanding. Let us submit the Indian, Greek, or Egyptian figures to recognized standards, and to criticism a little more penetrating than is involved in merely counting heads or arms.

Leonarde says that the figure is most worthy of praise which by its action best expresses the passion that animates it.

Hsieh Ho demands that the work of art should exhibit the fusion of the rhythm of the spirit with the movement of living things.

Mr. Holmes suggests that a work of art must possess in some degree the four qualities of Unity, Vitality, Infinity and Repose.

In other words, a work of art is great in-so-far as it expresses its own theme in a form at once rhythmic and impassioned: through a definite pattern it must express a motif deeply felt.

From this point of view it would seem that we must take each work of art upon its own merits. To apply the simplest tests just quoted — I wish to speak with the greatest possible simplicity — an image with many arms or heads may be called an inferior work of art, or inartistic, if it lacks any one of the four qualities demanded by Mr. Holmes, or as we may say, if it is not felt. But if it has such qualities, if it is felt, need we further concern ourselves with arithmetic ?

The artist does not choose his own problems : he finds in the canon instruction to make such and such images in such and such a fashion — or example, an image of Nataraja with four arms, of Sada Siva with five heads, of Mahisha-Mardini with ten arms, or of Ganesa with an elephant's head. Our critics are bold enough to assert that in obeying these instruction he **cannot** create a work of art. It would have been fairer and more moderate to suggest that the problems propounded are often very difficult; this would have left open the way to recognize a successful effort, if such could be found. To have overcome the difficulties would then be a proof of artistic capacity — and I suppose it should be the aim of the historian of art to discover such proofs.

In the Javanese sculpture of Mahisha-mardini with ten arms, we have an illustration, slaying the demon Mahisha. She is here a dread avenging power; yet she is neither cruel nor angry, but rather sad with the sadness of those who are wise, playing an inevitable part, though at heart no more than the spectator of a drama. This entire figure, damaged as it is, shows what tenderness may be expressed even in tamasic images. And this peace and tenderness find expression in the movement of the whole figure, and not by any arbitrary means : no part of the whole is at war with any other, and this is what we mean by unity. It would indeed be futile to condemn an image such as

this because it has ten arms. Or take the *Nataraja* image of the primal rhythmic energy underlying all phenomenal appearances and activity : here is perpetual movement, perpetually poised — the rhythm of the spirit.

The death of Hiranyakashipu is a work that may be called grotesque. We have long learnt however that this cannot be used as a mere term of abuse. It would be difficult to imagine a more splendid rendering of the well-known theme of the impious king who met his death at the hands of the avenging deity in man-lion form. The hand upon the shoulder, the shrinking figure with the mocking smile that has no time to fade — what could be more terrible ? These are figures expressing by their action their animating passions : or if not so, then none have ever been. It would be unkind to contrast a work such as this with the 'truth to nature' of the Laokoon.

In these figures we can not speak of the many arms as 'additional members' because in a human being they might appear to be such. If the work is a unity we can no more speak of added elements, than we can speak of ornament in a work of art as something added to an expression that would not otherwise be beautiful. It is not by addition or removal that we create. Before these works we can only ask, are these, or are they not, clear and impassioned expression of this subject matter ? All unprejudiced and competent observers would then agree that amongst Indian images there are some of which we can say that they are such adequate expressions, and of others that they are not : but to recognise those and these requires a rather more subtle approach than that involved in the arithmetical process of counting arms or heads.

Certain developments in the most modern art could be quoted in comparison with the Indian complex figures, and, indeed, the method of these is more than modern. Some painters of the present day have sought by many strange devices to create a synthetic and symphonic art representing a continuity of thought or action, and an interpretation of ideas belonging to more

than a single phase of personality — an art of interpretation. And if, as we now realise, even the human personality is compound, we should understand that this must be even more true of a cosmic divinity, who is, indeed, able by a division of *Upadhis*, to function in many places at one time.

These forms remain potentially equally satisfactory, too, whether as philosophers we regard them as purely abstract expressions, or with the artists themselves regard them as realistic presentations of another order of life than our own, deriving from a *deva-loka*, other than the world we are familiar with, but not necessarily unknowable or always invisible. The distinction in any case is slight, for the images equally belong to a world of their own, however we regard them.

Art is true to experience and feeling. But aside from that, whatever work of art is ostensibly representative must be judged according to the logic of the world it represents — even if that would be no other than the idea-world. All worlds are idea-worlds of one kind or another, and we should also remember that ‘recognition does not necessarily imply any real knowledge of things in themselves — we do not know that men have really two arms, that is merely an ‘intelligible representation’. It is no criticism of a fairy tale to say that in our world we meet no fairies. It is no criticism of a beast-fable to say that after all animals do not talk English or Sanskrit. Nor is it a criticism of an Indian icon to point out that we know no human beings with more than two arms.<sup>1</sup>

1. **The Dance of Siva** Coomaraswamy :

( 13 )

**Three Letters**

( A )

The Editor

New Nation, New York

Sir,

Lord Willingdon is reported to have said that 'no self-respecting government could afford to ignore Gandhi's challenge.' 'No one expects the British Government in India to ignore the present situation, but there are different ways of responding to it. So far, the response to civil disobedience, which has remained amazingly non-violent in view of the intensity of the feelings involved, has been the establishment of a 'legal' reign of terror. Life pensions have been announced as available for informers. Political prisoners are given hard labour or deported. A man can be indefinitely imprisoned without charge preferred, or condemned to death, in absentia on the basis of a police report alone; and while, in Britain, the slogan 'Buy British' is everywhere proclaimed, in India children have been condemned to years of imprisonment or to the lash for peaceful picketing. These are not the acts of a self-respecting government, but of one driven by rage and fear. One does not know how many English officials still living only as a consequence of Indian reluctance to take life; one does not feel that the British are hoping to break down this patience so that they may have an excuse to use their rifles and bombs on unarmed crowds. English diehards have repeatedly admitted that England cannot 'afford' to lose India; at the same time they have made it impossible that anything else should happen.

What, if anything, can be done here? We cannot expect the American government to interfere in British domestic affairs, however scandalous. But would it not be helpful to publish and distribute here some of the recent ordinances, together with a few

examples of ferocious penalties inflicted on children, and then to prepare an open letter of protest, such as one can not doubt that a few hundred of the most distinguished Americans would be glad to sign in their individual capacity ?<sup>1</sup>

Boston

*Aranda K. Coomaraswamy*

24-2-1932.

( B )

Museum of Arts  
Boston, Massachusetts  
Feb. 14, 1947

Dear Professor Jaidev Singh,

Many thanks for your letter. I am glad you liked my book 'Hinduism and Buddhism'. It was written, you see, mainly for European readers, so it did not seem necessary to translate the words in European languages.

I agree in the main with your article on Duhkha. However, both *Sukha* and *Duḥkha* contain the word *Kha*, and as you know these two words are commonly cited together, in contexts in which it is pointed out that the true philosopher, should bear 'pleasure and pain' patiently. I would not think that the *Kha* has direct reference to the axle-hole of just any chariot : pleasure and pain are *dvandva* that proceed from the *Kha* that can be equated with *Ākāśa* and with the *saṁskāra dvāram* from which comeforth all *dvandva* that are in the world. This 'opening' corresponds, of course, to the axle-hole of the uppermost ( heavenly ) wheel of the great cosmic chariot; it is the same as the successive *Khani* through which in RV Indra draws Apala.

To say that the *skandhas* are *duḥkha* is not a definition of *duḥkha*, but is to point out that *duḥkha*, pain, suffering, misery

1. This letter shows how deeply Coomaraswamy was concerned about India; it sums up extremely well his attitude towards Mahatma Gandhi's Civil Disobedience movement.



arise from them. In just the same way in English one would say, suppose we had an uncomfortable chair, 'This chair is a nuisance', but this would only mean that the chair causes discomfort, it would not be a definition of the word 'nuisance.'

Most of my reprints are exhausted; many of my articles can be seen in Indian Journals such as the New Indian Antiquary, Indian Culture, Bhandarkar Research Institute Journal, etc., or in the Journals of American or English learned societies. I am sending you a few of which I still have copies.

With best wishes,

*Very Sincerely*

**A. K. Coomaraswamy**

Prof. Jaideva Singh  
Banaras Hindu University  
Banaras

( C )

Museum of Fine Arts  
Boston, Massachusetts  
May 19, 1947

Dear Mr. Jaidev Singh,

Many thanks for your letter of 11-4-47. About *ātman*, I regard all those derivations from *at*, etc. as *nirukta*, i. e. valid interpretation based on phonetic analogy, but not as 'grammatical etymology.' I still have no doubt that *ātman* is connected with *an* (breath) or *va* (blow), and cognate of Greek 'xtuos' from 'su' blow; if also *anima*, Aw, of course, corresponds to Skt. *Va*.

Your papers interested me, especially on *bhavana* ('making become'); the word is much used in Pali Buddhism with reference to spiritual growth, and later, in *dhyāna mantrams* is virtually synonymous with *dhyi*, so that we get *dhyāyet* = *bhāvayet*.

I shall be able to send you some of the papers you ask for; but 'Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power' is a book you should order from the American Oriental Society, New Haven, Conn. U. S. A. ( 1. 75 ). You might like also to get my newbook, 'Am I My Brother's Keeper'? ( John Day Co., New York, 2. 25 ). Really, it would be easier for you to order one or both books from Orientalia, 47 West 47th Street, New York. My 'Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought' is published by Luzac, 46 Great Russell Street, London, W. C. 1(10/6). I have been obliged to make it a rule not to supply free copies of my books, for which I should have to pay the publishers myself. Even the making of reprints of articles costs me a good deal.

I do not know of any recent separate publication of Fitzgerald's version of the 'Mantiqu-t-Tair.' It is a very fine piece of work. The edition I use is 'Salaman and Absal and Bird-Parliament', Boston 1899, but that is long ago out of print. You will have to look now in some edition of Fitzgerald's collected works, I suppose.

I do not suppose I shall ever complete a work on *Ātman*. I have many unfinished books and articles in hand. I do hope to finish a book on **Reincarnation** this year. We plan to return to India for good at the end of 1948 and live somewhere in the Punjab, in absolute retirement. I don't expect to write a commentary on the Gītā but may do so on parts of the Upanisads.

I wonder what kind of college the YD is ? I am interested in places where Sanskrit is the main interest.

*Very Sincerely*

**Ananda K. Coomaraswamy**

**Two Tagore Poems**

( A )

Janmakatha  
( Birth-Story )

Where have I come from, Oh, where didst thou find me ?  
A baby is asking its mother :  
Folding the babe to her breast,  
Half-crying, half laughing, she answers  
'Thou wast in my heart as its desire,  
My dearest darling.

'Thou wast in the dolls of my childhood games,  
And when I made figures of Siva in clay.  
I made and unmade thee then :  
Thou wast enthroned  
With our household God;  
In His worship, I worshipped thee,  
My dearest darling.

In all sweet hopes that ever were mine,  
In all my loves and desires,  
In the life of my mother and in grandmother's life has thou lived:  
In the lap of the Lady  
Who rules in our house  
Thou hast for ages been hidden,  
My dearest darling.

When in girlhood my heart  
Like a flower was opening  
Thou wast a sweet fragrance about it :  
Thy own tender softness  
Thou gavest, unknown,  
To my youthful form,  
My dearest darling.

Thou pet of all shining ones,  
Thou eternal unchanging,  
Co-aged with dawn-  
From the world's dream-life  
Thou hast been borne on a torrent of bliss  
As a real thing to play with my heart,  
My dearest darling.

As I gaze on thy face  
Thy mystery I cannot understand :  
Thou belongs to all and how can'st thou be mine ?  
My body I kiss in thine  
Since now thou art mother's babe :  
Laughing thou com'st to the world,  
My dearest darling.

'Lest I should lose thee  
I hold thee tight to my breast  
I cry if I see thee not every moment !  
I know not what snare of Māyā  
Could entrap the world's treasure  
In these slender arms of mine,  
My dearest darling.<sup>1</sup>

( B )

Bidaya  
( Farewell )

Mother darling ! let me go, Oh let me go !  
In the dim and early dawn,  
When you stretch your empty arms  
And cry 'O Baby mine,'  
I shall whisper 'Baby is not here.'  
Mother darling, let me go !

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1. Translated by Coomaraswamy in collaboration with Ajit Chakravarty, who was the Private Secretary of the Poet and published in the Modern Review, March, 1911.

I shall be as a breath of the blowing wind  
And pass by your breast in a high.  
You never can hold me fast in your arms :  
I shall be a wave of the water  
And none can ever know what I am,  
When you bathe I shall play all around you.

When at night the rain falls down in showers.  
You will lie in our bed alone and think of me :  
The patter of rain on the leaves will be my voice.  
I shall flash in lightning through your windows—  
Do you think you will know my wild laughter then ?

When the night is late and dark  
And you are wakeful and sad  
I'll be a star and softly whisper : 'Sleep, mother dear.'  
When at last you are sleeping worn and tired  
I'll be the moonbeam that rests on your bed  
And kiss your sweet closed eyes.

If your eyelids are open ever so little  
I shall come peeping in as a dream,  
And love you while you're asleep,  
Then you will wake with a start  
And feel for me in the bed,  
But I shall have vanished, where nobody knows.

In the Puja holiday time  
Children will come to play in our garden  
Saying 'Baby is not in this home.'  
Even then in the sound of the flute  
I shall pass through the sunlit sky  
And follow you in all your work in the home.

When aunty comes and questions you  
With holiday presents in her hands —  
'Sister, where has your baby gone ?'  
Say to her, 'Baby is everywhere,

He is in the pupils of my eyes,  
He is on my breast and rests in my lap.<sup>1</sup>

15

### **Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of government**

It may be said that the whole of Indian political theory is implied and subsumed in the words of the marriage formula 'I am That, thou art this, I am Sky, thou art Earth, etc. addressed by the Brahman Priest, the Purohita, to the King in AB. VIII. 27. This being so, and as it has been pretended that these words were addressed by the King to the Priest, it becomes desirable, if the theory is to be understood, to establish once for all that, as it is explicitly stated by Sayana, it is the Purohita that utters them ... That the Purohita, as the designation itself implies, takes precedence of the King is explicit in RV. IV. 50. 7-9, 'To him the people of themselves pay homage, in whose realm the Brahmā goeth first,' quoted in AB VIII. 27. The feudal relationship of the Regnum to the Sacerdotium is explicit in Agni's words addressed to Indra, 'I in person go before thee and if thou givest me my share (or due, then shalt thou through me, O Indra, perform heroic deeds, RV. VIII. 100. 1.

Our starting point will be SB. IV. 1. 4, where the Mixta Persona of Mitravarunau is the 'Counsel and the Power' and these are his two selves ... Mitra is the counsel and Varuna the Power, Mitra the Sacerdotium ( **Brahma** ) and Varuna the Regnum (Ksatra), Mitra the Knower ( Abhigantar ) and Varuna the Executive ( Kartri ). Now at the beginning these two were distinct, the Sacerdotium and the Regnum : then Mitra the Sacerdotium could subsist apart, from Varuna the Regnum, but Varuna the Regnum could not subsist apart from Mitra the Sacerdotium. Whatever deed ( **Karma** ) Varuna did that was

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1. This poem was Coomaraswamy's independent translation and Rabindranath highly praised it. It was published in the Modern Review, April 1911

not quickened by Mitra the Sacerdotium, was unsuccessful. So Varuna the Regnum called upon Mitra the Sacerdotium, saying: 'Turn thou unto me that we may unite; I assign to you the precedence; quickened by thee I shall do deeds'. That is, therefore, the origin of the Purohita's office ... whatever deed, quickened by Mitra the Sacerdotium, Varuna did thenceforth, succeeded. The choice is mutual; if either the Purohita or the King be ill-chosen by the other it is called a comingling of right and wrong.

The king appoints the Purohita or, more literally, 'puts him in front.' The Devasvah are the deities — Savitri, Agni, Soma, Brihaspati, Indra, Rudra, Mitra and Varuna — by whom the King is 'quickened' through the Priest who invokes them as 'King-quickeners' ( rajasvah ), so that 'It is these Gods that now quicken him, and having been quickened by them, he is henceforth quickened.' He rules, then by 'Divine Right.' The Rajasuya, or alternately Varunasava is, then, the sacrificial and initiatory ritual of the 'king's Quikening; the most essential part of this rite is an 'aspersion' ( **abhiseka**, **abhisecaniya** ), cf, AV. IV. 8. 1, and this corresponds to what now would be called a 'coronation'. The 'quikening' refers to the fact that the rite is both initiatory and sacrificial; the king is brought forth, new born from the initiatory death, by the officiating Priests who are, in this respect, his 'fathers'.

In a traditional society, whatever is said by whoever 'has the say so' is 'no sooner said than done. It is not with his hands but by his fiat or edicts that a King 'works'. He is the 'Voice' that gives effect to the purposes of the Spiritual authority, and thus does the will of God on earth. What is done vocally is done indeed. Just as *in divinis* 'Indra the Regnum' is the Voice' and it is by this voice that Agni performs the Sacrifice, so it is at the Royal Sacrificer's word of command that the 'work' ( **Karma**, the sacrificial work essential to the welfare of the kingdom ) is done ( SB. I. 9. 1. 2. ), 'it' is with the voice

that he says 'Do this', and there with the altar is built ( SB. X. 5. 1.1 ). The dual government 'knows all purposes intellectually and announces them verbally.

When the royal 'Voice' is thus informed, 'what is done vocally is done indeed': Priest and king speak 'with one voice.' and just as it is only when instigated by the Sacerdotium that the king is effective ( SB. IV. 1.4.5 ), so in the same way 'whatever the subject does uninstituted by these two, the Sacerdotium and the Regnum, is misdone and men belittle it, saying : 'Even what he does is un-done ( **akritam** ) ( AB. II. 38 ). It follows from the foregoing that it is not for the king to say ( command ) or do anything or everything he likes, but only what is 'ordered to the end' and thus 'correct'. The king, in other words, is a **Sadhaka**, whose 'art' is the science of government, the 'King's leading' or 'policy' ( **rajaniti**, **nitisastra** ) in which the Purohita has been his Master; for 'science' ( vidya, i. e. truth as distinguished from opinion ) is a combination or ensemble, or in other words the child, of Intellect and Voice, both of which are essential to an enunciation of truth, and just as in the case of the macrocosmic and microcosmic harps, of which the concert ( **Samhita** ) of the player with the instrument is the force, so it is only the skilled speaker that 'perfects the value of the Voice', and it is especially pertinent that it is said of him who understands this doctrine of the wedding of sound and meaning that 'His renown fills the earth, men hearken to him when he speaks in the assemblies, saying, 'Let this be done which he desires' ( SA. VII. 7, VIII. 9, 10, XIV )' The essentially vocal character of government is well brought out in PB. XII. 10. 4, 5 where, when in the Rajasuya it is said: 'At that very point they reach the reign of the Voice ( **rājyam-vacah** ) and thereby they betake the royal Sacrificer to his reign.

This is why the King cannot be allowed to task at random, to say what he likes, but only to speak wisely; this is why the Ksatriya, who is so much like a woman in other respects, is



said to love wisdom. For the king is only a true king insofar as he is in possession of his royal art or science, insofar as he does not fail of the end, and does not miss the mark; he is only a right ruler insofar as he is governed by his art, but crooked' if he is guided not by truth but by his own inclinations: that **ars sine scientia nihil** is as true of the art of government as of any other.

If the Oriental and traditional Monarch is not a 'constitutional ruler' whose actions merely reflect the wishes of a majority of his subjects or those of a secular minister, nor king by virtue of any 'social' contract, but a ruler by Divine Right, this does not imply that he is an 'absolute' ruler, but on the contrary that he is himself the subject of another King as is explicit in A.I. 109, and echo of BU. 1.4.14 where it is affirmed that the Law ( **dharmā** ), than which there is nothing higher, is the very principle of royalty. We see, accordingly, what ultimate value attaches to the expression 'King of Kings' (**adhirājo rājānām**), and that while the 'constitutional monarch' may be controlled by his equals, or even his inferiors, the ruler by Divine Right is controlled by a Superior.

We can understand better now the traditional and world-wide doctrine that the very life and fertility of the realm depend upon the King,<sup>1</sup> to whom accordingly it is said: 'For our bread art thou, for rain unto us art thou, for our paternity of offspring for all this have we aspersed thee (SB. IX. 3. 3. 11). For unless the king fulfils his primary function as Patron of the Sacrifice ( *yajamāna* ) the circulation to the 'Shower of Wealth' ( Vasoṛ dhara ), the limitless, inexhaustible food of the God' that falls from sky as Rain and is returned from the Earth to Sky in the smoke of the burnt-offering will be interrupted (SB. 3. 3. 15, 16) : that man's offering is transmitted to the Gods in the smoke of the Sacrifice is, of course, in the fact that Agni is the missat

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1. 'It is upon the observance of ritual that the governance of a state depends.'  
( Confucius ).

priest ( RV. III. 10. 3 ) and it is indeed in the same way that the spirit of the deceased, whose body is offered up on the funeral pyre, ascends thence.

But, if the king cooperating with and assimilated to the higher power is thus the Father of his people, it is nonetheless true that satanic and deadly possibilities in herein the Temporal Power : when the Regnum pursues its own devices, when the feminine half of the Administration asserts its independence, when Might presumes to rule without respect for Right, when the 'woman' demands her 'rights', then these lethal possibilities are realised; the king and the kingdom, the family and the house, alike are destroyed and disorder ( *anṛta* ) prevails. It was by an assertion of his independence and a claim to 'equal rights' that Lucifer fell headlong from Heaven and became Satan, 'the Enemy' : and by a like paranoia that Indra, 'when maddened by pride in his own heroic power' became their oppressor, and could only be reawakened from his stupor by the Spiritual-Power. A self-assertion on the part of the Regnum is at the same time destructive and suicidal.

In a traditional society the oppressor is excommunicated and legally deposed; this may be followed by a submission and apoktasis, as in Indra's case, or by the installation of a more regular successor in whom the kingship is reborn. In an anti-traditional society, when the oppressor has been removed by a popular revolution, those who have been oppressed propose to govern in their own interests, and become oppressors in their turn. The majority oppresses the minority. The rise of a plutocracy undermines what is still in name majority rule. The inefficiency and corruption of the plutocracy prepares the way for the seizure of power by a single proletarian who becomes a Dictator, or what is called in more technical terms a Tyrant, who no longer pays even lip service to any power above his own, and even if he has 'good intentions' is nevertheless 'unprincipled'. This caricature of monarchy in turn prepares the way for a state of disorder such as may well be realised in the world in our own

times. It is, indeed, already apparent that 'what we call our civilization is but a murderous machine with no conscience and no ideals'. ( G. La Piana in **Harvard Divinity School Bulletin**, XXXVI. 27 ). Such is the final consequence of the divorce of the Temporal Power from the spiritual Authority, Might from Right, Action from Contemplation.

Thus from the standpoint of Indian sociological theory and that of all traditional politics, an individual tyranny, whether that of a despot, that of an emancipated artist, or that of the self-expressive man or self-sufficient woman, effects in the long run what is ineffectual (*akṛtāni*) misdeeds : all self-importance leads to the disintegration and finally the death of the body politic, collective or individual. The essence of the traditional politics amounts to this, that 'Self-government (*Svarāj*) depends upon self control (*ātmasamnyama*), Rule on ruliness. One may say that this conception of government survives even in modern India, since the political victory foreseen by Gandhi is assuredly one that can only be achieved by a self-conquest.

The king is such by Divine Right and Appointment, and by the same token the Executive of a higher than his own will; or if he rules only by might and does his own will, he is a Tyrant and must be disciplined. The Kingship envisaged by the Indian and traditional doctrine is thus as far removed as could well be from what we mean when we speak of an 'Absolute Monarchy' or of individualism. The supposedly 'Machiavellian' **Arthaśāstra** flatly asserts that only a ruler who rules himself can long rule others.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Extracts from **Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of government** : (American Oriental Series, Vol. 22 : Cromaraswamy,

## *APPENDIX II*

### **'The Message of the East' :**

**( A Review )**

We shall be much interested to see what reception will be given to the eloquent and forcible little volume which the distinguished Indian art critic, Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy, has just published under the title of 'The Message of the East'. This scholarly thinker and lover of art finds little to please him in the present condition of India. He sees the politicians in the ascendancy and most of them afflicted with the delusion, as he holds it, that if India is to be regenerated she must work out her salvation by competing with Manchester in the manufacture of cheap cotton goods or by the indigenous production of matches, soap and fountain pens. And while the advocates of Swadeshi are engaged in this misguided effort all that is most characteristic of India, including the arts which made her the wonder and envy of the world, is perishing from neglect.

From this point of view the whole Swadeshi movement as at present directed, makes not for the elevation, but for the degradation of India, not for restoring national life but for destroying all that gives any ground for hoping that India will one day proclaim her message to the West. 'Go into a swadeshi shop', he writes, 'you will not find these things, but you will find every kind of imitation of the productions of European commerce, differing only from their unlovely prototypes in their slightly higher price and slightly inferior quality.' The idea of realising national self-consciousness—to use a phrase much loved by ardent politicians—by the manufacture and sale of dingy grey shirtings, or materials coloured with loud aniline dyes or travelling trunks painted with every colour of the rainbow, seems to Dr. Coomaraswamy, a wild absurdity over which he hardly knows whether to smile or to weep. Such a grotesque ideal could not, he asserts, have been conceived by men who understood and loved India.

It will doubtless amaze the congressmen, the political organisers, and the orators of mass meetings who claim to feel the pulse of the Indian people and to be promoting their best interests to be told that they have no real and intelligent affection for their country. But the eloquent art critic has no hesitation in the matter. 'This loss of beauty in our lives', he says, is a proof that we do not love India, for India, above all nations, was beautiful not long ago. It is the weakness of our national movement that we do not love India, we love Suburban England, we love the comfortable bourgeois prosperity that is to be someday established when we have learned enough science and forgotten enough art to successfully compete with Europe in a commercial war conducted on its present lines. It is not thus that nations are made'. This is plain speaking. Those who have thought most on the question will be disposed to admit that the doctrine contains a large measure of truth.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Extract from an editorial under the caption 'Oomaraswamy regrets degradation of India', in the Statesman, September 22, 1909.

*APPENDIX III*

( A )

**A letter from Mrs. Coomaraswamy**

39 clinton Street  
Cambridge 39, Mass.,  
September 28th 1937

Mr. Moni Bagchee  
c/o Letters to the Editor  
Statesman, Delhi

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter dated September 3, 1937. This cutting came to me through the courtesy of Devahuti and Damodar P. Sinhal. May I trouble you to send me copy of the article by S. K. Datta-Ray, printed on the birthday of Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy ?

I have been collecting these bits, they will come in very handy, when I compile a biography of the man. For your own information, I have been editing the collected writings for the past 15 years. A great deal of this work will begin to be printed this coming year.

When I was in India, 1935, I hoped that both Sahitya Academy and the National Book Trust would come forward and propose a plan for presenting the Coomaraswamy works at the prices that Indian students can afford to pay. However, nothing of this sort happened. The few proposals that came forth were such that they bordered on the absurd.

When the work has been brought out by my American Foundation at American prices, some Indians will wake up, but this is the situation.

Thank you again for your interest,

Sincerely yours,  
Mrs. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy  
(Donna Luisa Coomaraswamy)

( B )

**My Letter on Coomaraswamy**

The Editor,  
The Statesman  
Calcutta

Sir,

I thank you whole-heartedly for publishing Sunanda K. Datta-Ray's article on Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy in remembrance of his 90th birthday in **The Statesman** of August 19-20. Calcutta should have observed August 22 – Coomaraswamy's birth anniversary – in a befitting manner by holding meetings in memory of the man who was the main interpreter of Indian art in its wider perspective; also a literary critic and a philosopher. Indeed, Dr. Coomaraswamy was one of the most versatile minds of his generation who constituted an essential factor in modern India's cultural awakening to maturity. Between 1895 and 1947 he became the author of more than 500 publications, dealing with an astonishing range of subjects. Among his works, *The History of Indian and Indonesian Art* ( Published in 1927 ) might be regarded as his chief contribution to the study of Indian art in its historical, sociological and philosophical contexts. But he will be best remembered as the author of **The Dance of Siva**, which is an aesthetic summing up of our Indian view of life that lights up the depths of the creative process.

Ten years hence and we shall be celebrating the birth centenary of Dr. Coomaraswamy. It is hoped that by that time we will be provided with an authentic biography of this great exponent of India's art, culture and religion. It is also much desired that a collected edition of his writings ( most of which are now no longer available ) should be published and distributed at a price that all students can afford, under the auspices either

of the Sahitya Academy or the National Book Trust. We should not forget that Dr. Coomaraswamy was as much an Indian as he was a child of Ceylon and England.<sup>1</sup>

Yours faithfully  
Moni Bagchee

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1. This is the letter referred to in Mrs. Coomaraswamy's letter; it was published in **The Statesman** dated September 3, 1937 in both its Calcutta and Delhi editions, under the caption "Exponent of Indian Art"



#### APPENDIX IV

##### A Seminar on Coomaraswamy

[ in its initial attempt to celebrate the birth centenary of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Calcutta University, organised a three-day seminar in June 1926, which was inaugurated by Dr. Niharranjan Ray. Learned papers were read in this Seminar. Here we reproduce relevant extracts from five of them which touch upon some of the important aspects of Coomaraswamy's genius. ]

( A )

##### Ananda Coomaraswamy : His contributions to the Studies in Brahmanical Iconography

Of the Brahmanical divinities, the most favourite to Coomaraswamy was Siva, the master-dancer ( **Nataraja** ). The cosmic dance of Siva forms the theme not only of his famous essay, the 'Dance of Siva' ( 1912 ), but of several subsequent articles. In his 'Dance of Siva' the great scholar has gone far beyond the dry iconographic research and has reached the grass-roots of Indian tradition and philosophy. His wide and deep knowledge of the **sastras** of ancient and early mediaeval India enabled him to recognize in the divine dance the articulation of the five activities ( **panchakritya** ) of the great god and decipher and three-fold significance of this cosmic dance : the rhythmic play as the source of all movements within the cosmos, release of countless souls from the snare of Illusion and the location of Chidambaram, the place of the dance, and the centre of the universe, within the heart. Thus long before Erwin Panofsky ( 1922 ) Coomaraswamy brought out the importance of the 'intrinsic meaning' of a divine image.

The iconological approach is evident in his another work, **Yaksas**, again a classic in the field. He collected enormous

literary and archaeological materials in this work to prove, inter alia, that the Yakshas were intimately associated with the elements of **bhakti** and **puja** in Indian religion: and that the iconographic type of the Yakshas ( the standing figure with the right hand raised and the left on the hip ) provided the model for the cult-images of deities like Siva and Buddha. In it he also ingeniously suggested that the images of deities which were [ fashioned by a certain class of people for their livelihood ( as alluded to by Panini ) were ] not the orthodox Vedic gods, but were popular objects of worship like the Yakshas and Nagas, and also perhaps Vasudeva, Arjuna and the Maharajas ( the guardian-deities ).

Sri-Lakshmi, Indra and Ganesa are other Brahmanical deities which received the attention of Coomaraswamy. His suggestion that Ganesa iconically belongs to the Yaksha type seems to be quite apposite. Besides, he was the first scholar who tried to explain the various symbols appearing on the punch-marked and other early Indian coins and recognize in their style 'an explicit iconography'. Indeed, Coomaraswamy transferred many of these symbols and similar art-motifs from the category of ornamental to that of significant.

Collectively, Coomaraswamy's contributions to the studies in Indian iconography ( his depth-studies in Buddhist iconography, e. g., 'The Origin of the Buddha Image', may be recalled in this connection ) are not only pioneering, but also remarkable on account of his insight and scholarship. They elucidate what their author believed : 'Iconography is the constant essence, and style the variable accident, of art'. His studies in Brahmanical iconography inspired later writers and two stalwarts in the field, T. A. Gopinath Rao and J. N. Banerjea, are explicit on this point. While Rao reproduced his entire article on the dance of Siva in his **Elements of Hindu Iconography** ( Vol. II, 1916 ), Banerjea expressed his indebtedness to the lead that Coomaraswamy gave to the study

of a complex and specialized subject like iconography ( **Presidential Address**, Indian History Congress, Allahabad, 1935 ).

—*Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta*

( B )

**South East Asian Architecture as viewed  
by Coomaraswamy**

The study of the architectural history of south and south-east Asia received a firm footing when Fergusson published his *A History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*. An imperial pride, however, coloured the opinions and observations of Fergusson. His research, therefore, led him to discover a Greek ancestry of all architectural activities in India. It was difficult for the nationalist Indians to digest what Fergusson wanted to establish. As their mouthpiece R. L. Mitra launched a crusade against Fergusson. With sound arguments he was able to disprove the theory of Greek origin of Indian monuments. Starting from where Mitra ended Swami Vivekananda searched for the meaning of Indian art and became convinced about its superiority over the western art. The thinking of Vivekananda, expressed through occasional remarks, received shape in the writings of Sister Nivedita. Following her Ananda Coomaraswamy devoted himself to the task of discovering the underlying meaning of Indian art and its contribution to the development of Eastern art. The fulfilment of such a task required a thorough understanding of the art products of the East. In the process of this understanding was prepared his *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*. In an age when the urge of self-assertion made the Indian to discover in their land the genesis of world civilisation, it was not easy for Coomaraswamy to assess dispassionately the significance of India's contribution to the art activities in countries with which she came in contact. But Coomaraswamy was able to rise above the ordinary level. His book,

therefore, is entitled History of Indian and Indonesian Art instead of History of Indian and Greater Indian Art. He deals with the art of south-east Asia under the heading 'Further India'. Apparently, 'India intra-Gangem' of Ptolemy's Geography was responsible for using this heading by Coomaraswamy rather than any feeling of India's cultural conquest of that region. The obvious fact that India contributed a great deal to the development of regional cultures in this area was not denied by him. In facts, he recognises in each era an Indianesque period, when the local art constitutes to all intents and purposes a province of Indian art. It was followed, according to him, by a classical period, in which a local national formula was evolved and crystalysed. In his opinion "To apply the name of 'Indian colonial' to the several national schools, after the end of the eighth century, is an injustice to the vigour and originality of the local cultures.' With such an understanding of the art movement in south-east Asia, Coomaraswamy commenced his study of the architectural remains in this region.

—D. R. Das

(C)

### **Coomaraswamy and South-East Asian Art**

Coomaraswamy's pioneer work on South Asian Art.

Gupta art in South East Asia is mainly an emanation of north Indian tradition as South Indian art in that region is an emanation of the Amaravati School. Extention of Gupta art in Asia is conditioned by technique and thought of Gupta India. Sometimes monuments and sculptures are somewhat different, in consequence of local additions and re-interpretation. Flowering of Indian art in almost throughout Asia, reflects a peculiar synthesis of various regional styles and periods of the subcontinent. Expression of Gupta art beyond the seas and overland

is seldom pure and unmixed. Gupta art motifs and styles recur on the main land as well as islands. Buddhist sculptures and paintings are principal vehicles of Gupta heritage in Asia.

The earliest Gupta monuments and specially sculptures in South East Asia betray assimilation and integration of Andhra style of Amaravati School, followed by that of the Pallavas as shown in the figure of Harihara of Asram Maha Posoi of Com-bodia, Sempaga Buddha of Sumatra, etc.

The Gupta remains in old Prome, Burma : Anuradhapura, Ceylon; Ayodhya and Dvaravati schools of Siam and Gupta sculptures from Ligor, Takuapa and Caiya in Malay Peninsula show how the Gupta influence had travelled beyond the seas. Relation between Ajanta and Sigirya paintings.

Pre-Khmer art of Funan in Combodia ( 6th-7th century A. D. ) is almost purely Gupta in character. The Buddha images of Prei-Krabas, Vat Romlok, Son-tho and female torso from Sambor Prei Kuk as well as the only wooden figure from the plain of Reeds show definite Gupta lineage. Gupta elements in the art of Champa are also evident, till the 10th century.

Earliest Srivijaya images of Buddha and Bodhisattva from Sumatra betray Gupta derivation tempered by Pallava idiom. There is a paucity of Gupta sculptural remains in West Java- A panel in Djakarta Museum ( c. 5th-6th century A. D ) is obviously the earliest Gupta piece in South East Asia. Sarnath, Orissa and Ajanta schools exercised their influences on the, Buddhas of Borobudur, Chandi Sewu, Chandi Mendut and the bronzes of Central Java. Predominantly Gupta idiom of Boro-budur reliefs continued in Prambanan panels of the 9th century. Standing Buddhas of Celebes and Borneo are master pieces of Indian Art, beyond the seas.

—D. P. Ghosh

(D)

**Indian Sculpture as viewed by Coomaraswamy**

Academic study of Indian art has been of a recent development. In fact before Indian art came to the perview of people of discerning taste, and about art in Europe, mainly borrowed from the wide canvas of Renaissance, very little was taken note of. Gradually, however, the Europeans became increasingly interested in the tradition of this country. Their attention had also been drawn to the rich heritage of visual arts surviving in India from a very ancient age. Some notice of Indian art, particularly images of Indian Gods and Goddesses as also of rendering of animal figures by Indian artists, came to the perview of interested conquerors coming from the west. The account may be opened with the well known assessment made by John Ruskin of Indian sculptures, representing Indian Gods and Goddesses, as known to him. It was however not a very good evaluation even acceptable to other European authorities. Since the establishment of Asiatic Society in 1774 at Calcutta, sculptures from the different parts of the country started being collected for the galleries of the Asiatic Society and those specimens which could not be brought to Calcutta began to be reported in the Journal of the Asiatic Society. This had opened a wide vista of publicity of Indian art materials outside India, particularly in the countries which were increasingly turning into colonial powers. In India, as well as the neighbouring countries, where Indian culture found a very welcome state of development, the French were simply astounded to discover the Indianesque art heritage of Cambodian Empire, while the Dutch were overwhelmed by the astounding monuments of Borobudur and other places. The figure of Buddha migrating from India to wide areas in Asia became a veritable challenge to the western intellect.

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1. Sri D. P. Ghosh was the first Curator of the Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta University.

An assessment of Indian art, particularly of sculpture had already started by the end of the 19th century, when French authors like Foucher and Grunwedel made a detailed study of Gandhara sculptures and published those epitomes like "La art Greco-Buddhique", later translated into English as Graeco-Buddhist art of India'. Here in India of course the mighty intellectual, V. A. Smith had taken up the challenge of studying the Indian artistic heritage and finally produced his excellent "Magnum Opus", the History of Fine Arts in India and Ceylon. Though the great archaeological explorer Alexander Cunningham along with his devoted band of workers had made an excellent spade work for studying Indian art, Smith's volume remained even today a comprehensive evaluation of Indian artistic traditions including sculpture. A final say about Indian art, its possible origin, influences from Hellenistic, Roman, Persian and Central Asian sources etc. and the quality of technique after encouragingly spoken of had been the outcome of the endeavours of Cunningham as evaluated by Vincent Smith. What remained for Indian scholars to do was to follow the direction indicated by the European authorities and work out the details of the local, regional and characteristic elements in Indian sculpture.

It was at this stage that Coomaraswamy appeared in the field. Undoubtedly he had made a thorough survey, examination and study of the Indian sculptural art to find out the basic and inherent characters of this traditions. It was he who for the first time brought to the academic world the panoramic vista of Indian artistic tradition, first in his Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon and later in his monumental work, the History of Indian and Indonesian Art. He took an absolutely independent stand in evaluating the sources, the inspiration, the techniques and the spirit of Indian sculptural art. His pioneering work in the field was his dissertation on the origin of the Buddha Image, where he brought to the forefront the fact that Indian sculptural art was no product of model study, but had been memory work,

solely dependent on observations mentally made and conditioned by experience thinking and divination. The figure of man has been to Coomaraswamy wonderful creation. But, it was to be taken note of that the homosapien finally grew into a biped as a result of his continuous endeavour to look and to reach the above. The premise had been fairly well summarised by some authority when he had stated that "the Indians conceived of gods and paid them respect but finally they themselves conceived their own individual self (atman) as God himself." This served to Coomaraswamy as the key to the realisation of visual perception, integrated with a philosophical perception.

This outlook of Coomaraswamy in the evaluation and assessment of Indian sculpture gradually evolved and expanded to serve him as a bed-rock on which the whole cosmic realization of the Indian mind he had tried to establish.

This dynamic re-appraisal of Indian art, particularly Indian sculptures, stands to be thoroughly understood and fully worked by the student of Indian sculpture so that the real and basic nature of Indian sculpture may be understood by art loving people. In establishing his thesis Coomaraswamy, however, did not by any stretch of imagination ignore the scientific measures used by the Western world for evaluating art. As a matter of fact he had a thorough - knowledge of European, ancient Asian and Egyptian, as well as Chinese traditions. And he had not made any mistake or allow loopholes to enter the logic of his evaluation. This can be established when one proceeds to take note of the analytical process used by Coomaraswamy in establishing his thesis.

—*Kalyan Kumar Ganguli*



( E )

**Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's Contribution to the  
Study of Indian Paintings**

The present writer hails from the city of Banaras where Dr. Coomaraswamy wanted to build up some-where in 1910-11 an art gallery primarily with his extra-ordinarily rich collection of Indian paintings and drawings and desired to act as its Curator. His appeal unfortunately received no encouragement. Eventually the museum came into being not in Banaras but in Boston. In 1916, Dr. Coomaraswamy expressed his desire to become a Professor of Indian Art and Culture in Banaras Hindu University but it was not possible to get him one. Thus we failed to have him first as a Curator of a museum in Banaras and secondly we missed his valuable services as Professor of Indian Art & Culture. Indeed, it had been a great loss. However, it was his inspiration which forms the nucleus of Bharat Kala Bhavan, one of the famous museums of India, if not of the world, specially in the field of Indian miniature. Dr. Coomaraswamy inspired many Indians and advocated the cause of Indian art in India and abroad. He had a missionary zeal and he unravelled the mystery that shrouded the entire panorama of Indian arts. His tremendous interest and sensitiveness for Indian paintings could be gleaned through his several correspondence in which one could find several thought-provoking discussions and solutions on the said subject.

Dr. Coomaraswamy had been a pioneer in the study of Indian painting. He worked on insufficient evidences but his observations in this field still hold good although after Coomaraswamy's sad departure many more information came into the lime light. Dr. Coomaraswamy claimed in his book 'Rajput Painting' that 'this is a pioneer work'. Indeed it is and in it he cleared the confusion between the Mughal and Rajput School with which European scholars were much in trouble. Raphael Petrucci, Laurence Binyon etc. acclaimed this as an eye opener

with unstinted praise. **The Catalogues of Indians Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts**, Boston, namely Jaina Paintings and Manuscript, Rajput Painting and Mughal Painting are to be reckoned by the museologists as 'unsurpassable models for museum inventories' and for scholars in the field of Indian painting, they offer mines of authentic informations. His two series of **Indian Drawings** which were published for the members of the Indian Society, mainly based on his personal collection, where Dr. Coomaraswamy deals in the technicalities and peculiarities of Mughal and Rajasthani drawings with illustrations which give clear understanding about the basic structure of Indian paintings. **The Transformation of Nature in Art** by Dr. Coomaraswamy is collection of essays with exhaustive textual references to Indian paintings and Far Eastern art. These essays include 'jungle of foot notes' numbering about one hundred and seven which reflect the wide range of Coomaraswamy's knowledge on the one hand and on the other, these footnotes help men in the line in their respective field of researches. The book has a glossary of Sanskrit words in which he has supplied meticulously accurate philological interpretations of technical words with which students in the field are often put into troubles. Frank as well as oblique remarks on Indian Paintings by this great scholar are also to be met in his other books namely, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, *Why Exhibit works of Art?* etc. His articles and reviews in several leading journals also supply several valuable informations for the study of Indian paintings.

It appears from his contributions in the field of art that Dr. Coomaraswamy had been most anxious that the world should share his experiences. He had been a great critic of Indian paintings and a sensitive and able interpreter of the same. Sir William Rothenstein is obviously correct when he writes, 'today if India takes her due rank as a first class artistic power, it is in large measure owing to Coomaraswamy'.

—Dr. T. K. Biswas

## *APPENDIX V*

### Select Bibliography

#### **1. Works by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy**

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## **2. Works in Collaboration**

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## **3. Essays in Criticism**

Coomaraswamy contributed innumerable articles in various journals and compilations, viz., Art Islamica, Art Bulletin, Cultural Heritage of India, Indian Historical Quarterly, Journal of American Oriental Society, Journal of Asiatic Art, Journal of Indian Society for Oriental Art, Modern Review, Review of Religion, Spaculum, Zalmaxis etc; a large number of them still lie buried in the dust— laden pages of these journals. Besides these articles, the following deserve special mention :

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## List of Errata

[ The author and the publishers regret that in spite of our best care, some printing errors have crept in. Bellow we give a list of such errors. ]

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